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Faith in Action for Social Justice

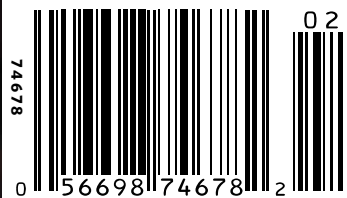
Standing Rock and Our Future

The resolute witness
of the Standing Rock
Sioux and their allies
offers a model for
the difficult days
ahead.

Fireworks fill the night
sky in North Dakota as
activists celebrate the denial
of a construction permit for
the Dakota Access pipeline.

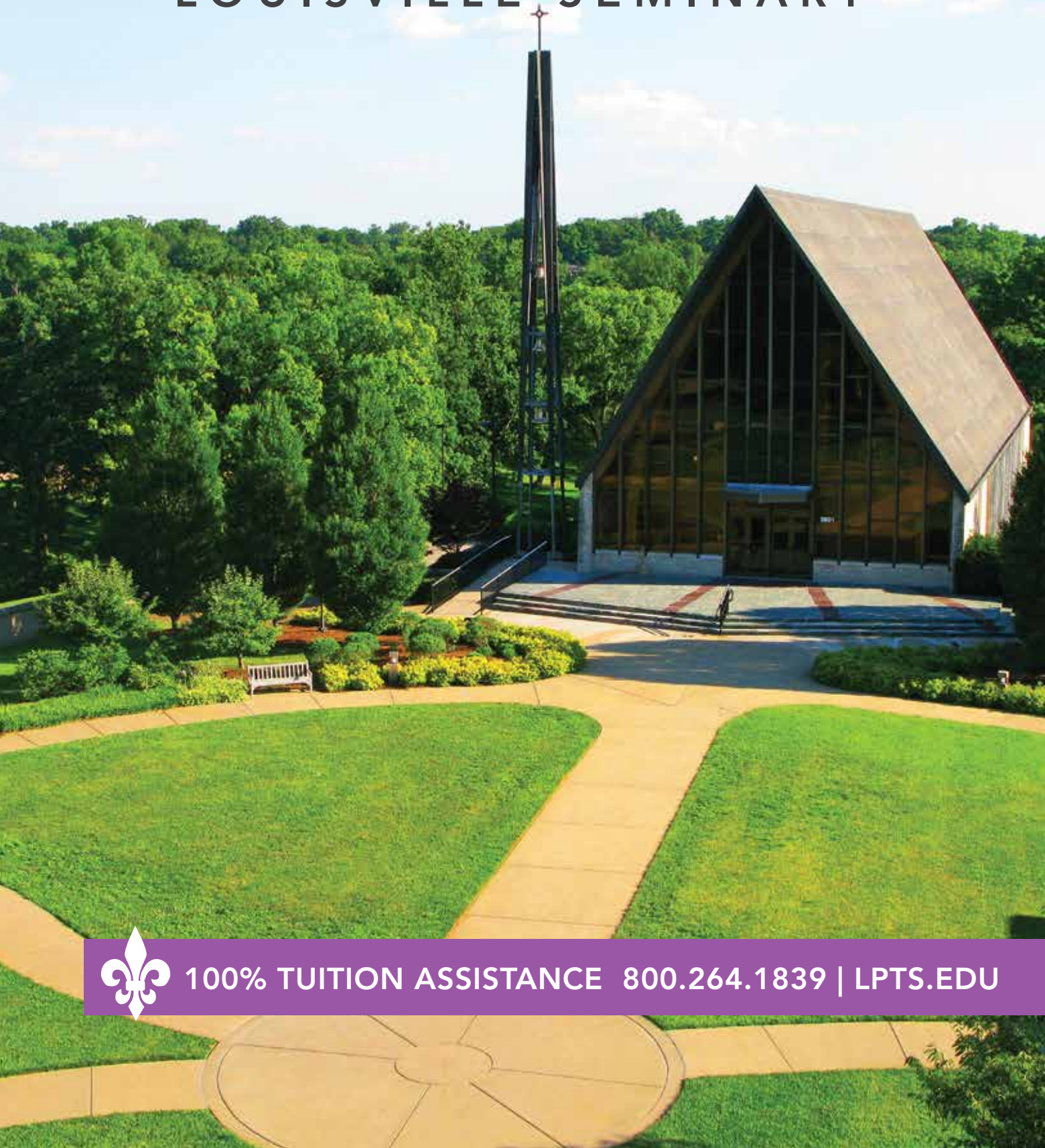
PLUS:

Decolonizing the Reformation
White supremacists and the White House
Syrian Christians under siege



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God First Since 1899

WELCOME TO a season of holy resistance: resistance against white nationalism, misogyny, and Islamophobia; resistance against false news and spectacle; resistance against the lie that America is greatest when it fears the stranger, deports the foreigner, and only protects the interests of those with wealth and power. And as Christians who take Jesus at his word when he says, “Whatever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me,” our holy resistance extends to the church when it endorses such lies or stands quietly to the side.

What should a magazine offer its readers in a season like this? As the editors of *Sojourners*, we believe our job is to provide contemporary models of resistance: real-life stories of people compelled by their faith to stand with those who are vulnerable. And

in the past several months, there’s been no better story of resistance than the Standing Rock Sioux. Since last April, the tribe and thousands of supporters have gathered on the banks of the Cannonball River in North Dakota to oppose the construction of an oil pipeline that threatens to contaminate the tribe’s water and sacred sites—and further fuel climate change.

In this month’s cover story, writer and photographer Gregg Brekke documents an interfaith gathering of clergy who—at the request of the Standing Rock Sioux—traveled to North Dakota to stand with the tribe and repudiate the theologies that granted Western colonizers the right to dominate Indigenous people and lands. It was an act of repentance and embodied solidarity, a way to join the “water protectors” in resisting

the lie that business and profit trump the well-being of Indigenous people and the environment we all share.

Faithful resistance also extends beyond protests and direct action, of course—to preaching, as the excerpt from Will Willimon’s book *Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism* illustrates, or to reclaiming the theological tools of the original reformers to exhort the church to full diversity, as “decolonize Lutheranism” organizer Francisco Herrera describes in his article. Faithful resistance also can include forming an arts and activism community such as The Sanctuaries in Washington, D.C., a group profiled by Catherine Woodiwiss in our CultureWatch section.

So wherever you are, be of good courage—and let’s get busy. ■

Letters

A Plateful of Good Stuff

“Game Changer?” by Rose Marie Berger in the December 2016 issue really challenges me as a Catholic. We are called to be a peace church. We are disciples of a nonviolent redeemer and liberator. I want to be nonviolent. It would mean that I have to love nonviolently. I cannot call anyone names. I should love the members of the other political party and work for unity. I should be a listener. I should advise military people to be conscientious objectors in violent affairs, and maybe more than that. I will love the veterans, as I presume they did what they did according to their conscience. I have a plateful of good stuff to do. Help me, dear Lord.

Rev. Anthony Kroll
Sauk Rapids, Minnesota

Those Who Have Ears ...

In the days following the ugliest election in my life (I was born in 1945), I have seen few, if any, commentaries on how this election impacted the children of America. Our kids hear our fears and anxieties, as well as what they hear on TV or radio, but they are not able to deal with and process those fears as are adults.

What is our Christian responsibility to help our children deal with and overcome the fear and anger they feel when they

We are disciples of a nonviolent redeemer and liberator. I want to be nonviolent.

hear the president-elect denigrate minority groups and promote violence against those who disagree? This is truly a teachable moment in every house of worship, and not just for adults. Our kids are suffering, and we cannot let the words of a narcissistic bigot go unchallenged. I agree with everything Jim Wallis said (“Ministers of Reconciliation,” December 2016), but I urge us not to forget the children.

Bill Turney
Houston, Texas

Ministers of Inspiration?

I was thrilled to receive my first issue of *Sojourners* magazine and find Jim Wallis’s article titled “Ministers of Reconciliation.” I am grateful for the reassuring inspiration I derived from his words.

Rev. Dale Morris Lee
Denver, Colorado

A Heavy Hand

In your November 2016 issue, David Gushee writes of Americans yelling at each other about abortion and our polarization on the subject (“The Abortion Impasse”). But he shows his own polarization with

the sentence, “Having actually held dead 18-week fetuses in my hands ... I think it is indeed a travesty that abortion is permitted in non-emergency circumstances as late as that.” I ask him: Have you ever held the hand of an 18-year-old girl dying of sepsis from a backstreet illegal abortion? I have. When abortion is not legal or the financial cost is too high, the poor seek out the unskilled—which can take weeks—while the wealthy go to other countries. Until we have a country that cares for and about all its citizens by lowering our high infant mortality rate and doing away with guns, wars, death penalties, and cop shootings, why should anyone worry about abortions? I think the answer is: It is a way to subjugate women. As Gloria Steinem says: “If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.”

Elizabeth Dunbar
South Hamilton, Massachusetts

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 408 C St. NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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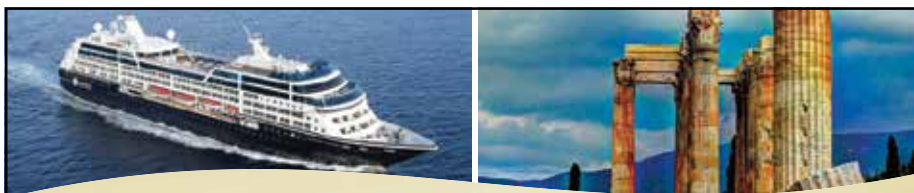
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BY JIM WALLIS

A Blueprint for Resistance



THOSE BEARING witness at Standing Rock have become some of the most important, and most prophetic, leaders protecting God's earth in America today—especially given the threat to our environment that Donald Trump represents.

There is no better example of what the struggle to protect God's creation looks like now, and may look like in the future, than the “water protectors” at Standing Rock, who have put their bodies on the line for months to stop the Dakota Access pipeline from being built on sacred tribal lands and endangering the water supply of Indigenous people. Native Americans have been joined by people of every color and creed, including clergy (see “A Chorus of Resistance” in this issue) and military veterans, to prevent the construction from moving forward, despite brutal attacks from

On the list of those most vulnerable in Trump's presidency—minorities, immigrants, and Muslims—we can add the poorest people on the planet, who will be the ones hit first and hardest by the catastrophe of climate change, which Trump will make more inevitable. Trump's campaign rhetoric suggests that he may become the most hostile president in decades to protecting God's creation. He has claimed that global warming is a hoax perpetrated by China, and that threats to the environment are not major problems. His incoming chief of staff, Reince Priebus, told the media that Trump operates under the assumption that climate science is mostly “a bunch of bunk.” Perhaps most tellingly, Trump chose a notorious climate denier, Scott Pruitt, to lead the Environmental Protection Agency.

Trump could not be taking office at a worse time in the struggle to save the planet and its inhabitants from the worst scenarios of climate change. In an act of resolve and hope, the world recently ratified a significant treaty committing the major carbon-producing countries to reducing their emission levels. The Paris agreement represents the first global step in the world coming together to tackle this threat. But during his campaign, Trump boasted that he would pull the U.S. out of the Paris accord, which would deal a crippling blow to the agreement's effectiveness. We don't have much time left to sufficiently reduce global emissions.

Fortunately, many states and large cities that are responsible for considerable amounts of U.S. carbon emissions have pledged to continue their own plans to reduce emissions in ways that conforms to the Paris targets. To the extent that the federal government actively impedes efforts to fight climate

change or protect the environment, unyielding resistance at the state and local level will be necessary to mitigate the worst impacts of an anti-science, anti-religious federal policy under Trump.

And yes, this is a religious issue. Protecting the environment is a crucial task for those of us who believe God has commanded us to be good stewards of creation. To the extent that the environment comes under direct assault with the permission of the state, Christians of conscience need to ask themselves what they are willing to risk in solidarity with poor and vulnerable people—who are always impacted first and worst by environmental damage—and in defense of the Earth itself. The positive leadership of Pope Francis and other global faith leaders—on climate change and on the environment in general—is in direct conflict with the shameful anti-creation impulses of Donald Trump.

Standing Rock may represent a taste of the battles to come to protect creation during the Trump presidency. Yet Standing Rock also offers a blueprint that can be replicated and refined as encounters like these happen in the years ahead. It shows that large, multiracial coalitions are still willing and able to come together, first of all in prayer, and face enormous adversity, suffering, and even state-sanctioned violence in order to stand up nonviolently for the rights of disadvantaged groups and the health of the planet.

I pray that this spirit of prayerful resistance infuses and empowers us all in the months ahead as we carry out our promise to deliver a habitable planet to our descendants and a more equitable world for all of God's children. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Standing Rock offers a taste of the battles to come.

private security forces and state law enforcement.

The decision by the Army Corp of Engineers in early December to deny an easement for the pipeline route across Lake Oahe on the Missouri River, adjacent to the Standing Rock reservation, will temporarily halt the construction. But the head of the company building the pipeline has been a major contributor to Trump's campaign, and with perhaps the most anti-environment president in memory about to enter office, the struggle is far from over.

“It is a temporary victory,” Denise McKay, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux told the *Washington Post*. “We've got to stay put and stay united.” Her daughter, Chelsea Summers, added, “everybody is still here for the long haul.”

By Maria J. Stephan

The Price of Freedom

How to organize civil resistance against democratically elected authoritarian leaders.

AUTHORITARIANISM is on the march. The rise of right-wing populism in Hungary, Poland, the Philippines, and now the United States highlights the fragility of democracy. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban has propagated anti-immigrant sentiment while cracking down on independent media. Poland's nationalist party has challenged judicial independence while asserting state control over media. Philippine's President Rodrigo Duterte has vowed to strip civil liberties and employ violent vigilantism to address drug problems. In the U.S., Donald Trump mobilized a largely white base while railing against societal groups, including Muslims and immigrants, to win the election.

Authoritarian figures elected in democratic contexts often ignore constitutions, gut institutions, consolidate power, and snuff out domestic dissent. Dictators are often vindictive; they put themselves above the law and thrive on fear and popular apathy. Their toolkit includes ridiculing and delegitimizing protesters, pitting societal groups against each other, and coopting potential challengers.

But authoritarian figures have an Achilles' heel. To stay in power, they depend on the obedience and cooperation of ordinary people. If and when large numbers of people from key sectors of society (workers, bureaucrats, students, business leaders, police) stop giving their skills and resources to the ruler, he or she can no longer rule.

Historically, the most powerful antidote to authoritarian figures has been strategic organizing and collective action. That includes civil resistance, employing tactics such as marches, consumer boycotts, labor strikes, go-slow tactics, and demonstrations. In democracies, civil resistance has often been used alongside institutional approaches (elections, legislation, court cases) to defend and advance political and economic rights.

Challenging authoritarian figures with civil resistance requires three things: long-term planning, organizational capacity to protect vulnerable groups while



Ivan Milutinovic/Reuters

A woman carries her dog with a sticker promoting "Otpor" (Resistance) during a protest rally in Belgrade, Serbia, to mark the anniversary of the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic.

expanding participation, and an ability to maintain nonviolence discipline in the face of repression and provocation. In the current U.S. context, Latinos, Muslims, African Americans, LGBTQ people, and undocumented immigrants have legitimate fears of their rights and liberties being undermined. The immediate focus of organizing

protests). Increasing the size and diversity of participation should be a central preoccupation, along with ensuring that new recruits are trained in direct action, negotiation, and nonviolence discipline. Authoritarian figures *want* protesters to use violence. It makes their job much easier. Training led by religious and secular leaders played a critical role in the

Authoritarian figures have an Achilles' heel. They depend on cooperation.

should center on these vulnerable groups and involve building coalitions and taking preventive measures (legal and direct action) to protect their rights and safety.

The initial allure of authoritarian figures often wanes, particularly once people feel the effects of corruption, incompetence, and abuses of power. The challenge for movement-builders is to set longer-term priorities; determine how change is going to happen at the local, state, and national levels; and build campaigns around clear goals and diverse tactics (that is, not just street

success of the U.S. civil rights movement, the Philippines' "people power" revolution, and the Serbian Otpor student-led movement.

Keeping nonviolent actions fun, lively, and provocative is key to unmasking the hate and hypocrisy that fuel authoritarian figures. In Serbia, Otpor developed clever, humor-filled campaigns to win allies (including members of the security forces) and expose the Milosevic regime's ineptitude. The Chilean opposition to Augusto Pinochet focused its nonviolent mobilization on a hopeful, alternative future for the

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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country while involving youth, unions, artists, and pensioners in tactics that ranged from strikes to banging pots and pans.

Saving America's constitutional democracy from a descent into authoritarianism will require getting ahead of the curve and energizing new and diverse constituencies, including Trump supporters with legitimate grievances.

If the price of freedom is eternal

By Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Undeterred by the Facts

Why would Israel make false accusations against an evangelical humanitarian aid organization?

ON JUNE 15, 2016, Mohammed el-Halabi, manager of World Vision's Gaza programs, was arrested by Israeli authorities, accused of funneling millions of donor dollars to Hamas, the Islamist political party that rules inside Gaza.

The case made international headlines—and had a dangerous chilling effect on Christian aid organizations working in the Middle East.

Well before el-Halabi had the opportunity to be tried—let alone convicted—of any crime, the Israeli foreign ministry prepared talking points, background materials, infographics, and videos, ordering the country's diplomats to hype el-Halabi's alleged confession to media and senior government officials around the world.

"Contacts, journalists, and relevant opinion makers should be briefed," ordered senior foreign ministry officials, with particular focus on targeting "liberal and religious groups," reported an Israeli newspaper.

But cracks in the Israeli government's case appeared almost immediately. The most gaping: "World Vision's cumulative operating budget in Gaza for the past 10 years was approximately \$22.5 million, which makes the alleged amount of up to \$50 million being diverted hard to reconcile," said Kevin Jenkins, president and CEO of World Vision International.

According to World Vision, its programs in Gaza are subject to internal and independent audits and external evaluations to ensure that funds benefit those intended, precisely the nearly half of Gaza's population living in poverty under a crippling blockade

vigilance, then strategic organizing and standing united in fierce resistance to bigotry, corruption, and authoritarian narcissism are its guarantors. ■

Maria J. Stephan is senior policy fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C.

enforced by Israel. El-Halabi was accused of embezzling \$50 million, yet World Vision's accountability process caps signing authority at \$15,000.

Undeterred by the facts, an Israeli foreign ministry spokesperson told Australian media: "It's like when you catch a serial killer; the question of whether he killed 50 people or 25 people is not really relevant, is it?"

El-Halabi's alleged confession was also suspect. El-Halabi was detained for three weeks without seeing a lawyer. He was not charged with a crime until more than seven weeks after his arrest. One of his lawyers said that el-Halabi was beaten repeatedly during his interrogations, making him fear for his life. El-Halabi has since renounced his



Children play in the ruins of buildings in Gaza destroyed by Israeli airstrikes.

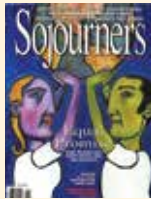
From the Archives

February 1998

By What Authority?

I AM Nancy Hastings Sehested, messenger from Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, and servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am a full-blooded Southern Baptist. My mother is a Baptist deacon. My grandfather was a Southern Baptist minister for 70 of his 93 years. My dad is a retired Southern Baptist minister with 50 years of ordained ministry. ...

By what authority do I preach? ... It is not a new question. It is a question that was asked of our Lord Jesus Christ on a number of occasions. He had not the authority of the religious establishment, nor the authority of the state, but the authority of none other than the Holy Spirit that moved in his midst.



And so, by what authority do I preach and bear witness to my faith? ... By the authority of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, becoming a servant. And following in his footsteps, as a servant of Jesus Christ, who took the towel and the basin of water and exemplified the kind of servanthood that each one of us is called to live under, I found a towel with my name on it. And who was it that taught me this wonderful freedom of the Spirit? My Sunday school teachers. My pastor. My Southern Baptist church, who nurtured me and said, "God calls each one of us, so listen!" And so I listened. ■

Nancy Hastings Sehested was pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., when this article appeared.

"confession" and denied all charges.

Another inconvenient fact: Like many Gaza residents, el-Halabi has suffered at the hands of both Israel and Hamas. Agence France-Presse reported that el-Halabi's sister, sister-in-law, and three other family members were killed by Hamas forces in 2009. And el-Halabi has written that seven of his family members were killed in one day in 2014 as the Israeli military pounded the Gaza Strip.

NPR and the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* have both reported that a former World Vision employee had a grudge against el-Halabi after being fired for receiving a salary from the Palestinian Authority while on the World Vision payroll. After his termination, the disgruntled employee filed a complaint against el-Halabi that was investigated and found to be false.

But in today's "post-truth" political climate, Israel's accusations have been enough to score a propaganda victory while deepening human suffering. As Israeli authorities froze World Vision bank accounts, more

than 100 employees in Gaza were laid off and thousands of beneficiaries deprived of crucial aid.

World Vision has embraced a "pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, pro-peace, and pro-justice" mission that includes "exchanges between international church groups and Palestinian churches." As more international Christians hear the voices of Palestinians—often through aid organizations working to ease their suffering and advocate for their rights—the Israeli government appears increasingly desperate to discredit people like el-Halabi, who says he continues to pray for those suffering on both sides. We can only hope his prayers don't go unanswered. But as an organization with a broad evangelical base of supporters, World Vision is a particularly strategic target in Israel's struggle for controlling Christian hearts and minds. ■

Ryan Rodrick Beiler is a freelance photo-journalist and member of the ActiveStills collective. He lives in Oslo, Norway.

By Grace Ji-Sun Kim

A Green Reformation

Protestants turned the world upside down once. Is it time to do it again on climate change?

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS after Martin Luther's charge *semper reformanda* ("always reforming"), we stand on the precipice of climate disaster.

In Marrakesh, Morocco, people of faith met at the 2016 U.N. Climate Change conference (COP22) to face an impending climate disaster—a disaster that now seems likely to be exacerbated by U.S. political leadership rather than mitigated by it.

The World Council of Churches held an event in Marrakesh to emphasize how transitional justice- and rights-based approaches, alongside faith-based moral perspectives, can address challenges as complex as natural-resource management and ecological, humanitarian, and spiritual crises exacerbated by climate change. WCC organizer Henrik Grape hoped that "COP22 will take steps forward to fulfill the expectations from Paris and that nations will raise their ambitions to keep the temperature

[rise] well under 2 degrees Celsius."

A wide variety of church bodies were represented at the gathering. The Lutheran World Federation brought youth delegates from Africa to Marrakesh to promote inter-generational collaboration and solidarity with people most affected by climate change. "One of our thematic approaches to the commemoration of 500 years of Lutheran Reformation is the theme 'Creation: Not For Sale,'" said Caroline Bader, youth secretary for the federation. The Act Alliance, a coalition of 143 churches and parachurch organizations, established a gender-climate change working group to address sustainability among poor and marginalized people through a gender lens.

Catholic theologian Guillermo Kerber believes that Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment is a turning point for the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, by including ecology in the social concerns of

Catholics. “The celebration of the 500 years of the Reformation should be an opportunity to express an ecological conversion of all Christian denominations,” said Kerber.

CLIMATE CHANGE INDICATES that global warming is happening. Climate justice is coming to terms with that reality. What will an “ecological reformation” look like?

Ecological reformation can occur when we reimagine creation as part of God’s body, tending to it with devotion and care. We can review church doctrine in light of climate change’s ecological endgame. Doctrine sets the boundaries of Christian life and practice. It should provide life-giving, life-sustaining guidance for people and all of creation. We can organize responsible stewardship in the wider society—for example, low-carbon economies, trash-to-energy programs, tax incentives for solar and geothermal power in private homes, tax penalties for companies with carbon-intensive production methods, and laws that criminalize egregious environmental violations.

The results of the U.S. presidential election were announced during the global climate meeting in Marrakesh. Most attendees were shocked, aware as they were that Trump is a climate-change denier who has stated his intention to withdraw the U.S. from the historic Paris accord to reduce global greenhouse emissions, which went into force in April.

Secretary of State John Kerry closed the Marrakesh meeting with a sobering speech. “We don’t get a second chance. The consequences of failure would in most cases be irreversible. And if we lose this moment for action, there’s no speech decades from now that will put these massive ice sheets back together.”

Where will the earth be when we celebrate the 1,000th anniversary of the Reformation?

The earth can thrive without human beings; but we cannot live without the earth. ■

Grace Ji-Sun Kim (@Gracejisunkim), an associate professor of theology at Earlham School of Religion, is the author of 10 books, including *Making Peace With the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice*.



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The 2017-18 intern program begins in August 2017. **Deadline for applications is March 1, 2017.**

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VIDEO



JP Keenan

I'm With Them

"First they came for the Muslims, and I said 'I'm with them,' even though I wasn't a Muslim." These words, published in a visual poem shortly after Donald Trump was elected president, have now reached 500,000 people in 28 countries. The poem was written and read by *Sojourners* senior associate editor Rose Marie Berger, who described her work as a riff on Jesus' words in Matthew 25 and the words of Martin Niemöller, a German pastor who critiqued Protestant churches for their complicity during the Nazi regime.

Listen to the poem at sojo.net/withthem.

SERIES



Reply All

The day after the election, *Sojourners* launched an open platform online for our readers to share their thoughts, feelings, and next steps. The response was overwhelming.

In two weeks, we published 100 stories from readers across the country and internationally. We heard from a lifelong Republican and sexual assault survivor who wept **"for what Christians were willing to support."** We heard from a member of the military who wrote, **"This isn't what I buried friends for."** We heard from a transgender woman, a grandmother fighting cancer, a Southern Baptist feminist raised in purity culture, a leader of a Christian nonprofit in Iraq, a descendant of the Armenian genocide—people who offered words of lament, repentance, anger, hope, pain, and fierce resolution to do whatever is necessary to resist hate. These words resonated deeply and spurred many to action. And it gave the editors and activists here at *Sojourners* much-needed fuel for the journey ahead.

So, thank you. We are so grateful for the readers of *Sojourners* and the giant community you represent—one marked by a commitment to the gospel and to each other.

Read the series at sojo.net/readerstories.

QUOTED

“We don't have to be the post-truth generation.” —**Courtney Hall Lee**
on reigniting the truth in an era of fake news
sojo.net/post-truth



“I’VE SEEN GOD DOING AMAZING THINGS AMONG MUSLIMS”

Evelyne Reisacher, associate professor of Islamic studies and intercultural relations, likes to share “stories of hope, not despair,” about Muslims. Bringing decades of experience working in Muslim contexts, this renowned speaker equips her students

to share Christ’s love with their Muslim neighbors—and contribute to the spiritual and social transformation of the most challenging realities of our day. Explore Fuller’s Islamic Studies master’s degree emphasis and learn from faculty like Dr. Reisacher.

Fuller.edu/IslamicStudies

 **FULLER**
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Campus Diversity in the Era of Trump

SOME TIME ago I took a long walk with a favorite professor of mine from the University of Illinois. I talked about how I'd turned my undergraduate activism in the campus diversity movement into a full-time career, and he told me an interesting story about identity.

The week before, he had needed to shift his 9 a.m. class to 8 a.m. because of a mid-morning appointment. He promised his students he'd bring in Panera to make up for dragging them out of bed so early. One of his students, a white kid from a rural area in Illinois, had asked, "What's Panera?"

Everybody else in his highly diverse class knew what Panera was, he stated matter-of-factly, making that white student's distinctive experience all the more striking. "Shouldn't any campus diversity movement that takes identity seri-



Lehigh University

and Khalil)—I've thought about that rural white student. The place she's from voted overwhelmingly for Trump. I wonder if she did. I wonder why I never wondered much about her before.

The Trump movement, for all the destruction it has caused, has made a set of invisible Americans visible. Perhaps part of the reason they voted for him was to scream:

I exist too. I have experiences too. I have pain and pride too. I don't know why these things never amounted to an

"identity" in my mind before Nov. 9. I am glad I see this a little more clearly now.

I speak at a lot of campuses in working-class cities and rural areas. I always ask about the well-being of the local Muslim population and encourage the campus to be involved in efforts to resettle refugees. I have never asked about how displaced factory workers are faring, or about the health of returned veterans.

I speak often about the pervasiveness of white privilege but rarely acknowledge that I (an American Muslim born in India) have one of the single greatest privileges you can possibly have in a knowledge economy: a graduate degree from an elite university.

Let me emphasize that I think the diversity

movement on campuses *should* be concerned with Muslim minorities, refugee and immigrant populations, African Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community. I believe that welcoming these stories and affirming these experiences does not mean we have to ignore displaced factory workers, returned veterans, or white students from rural areas who have never heard of Panera. I believe the human heart and the American promise is wider than we ever imagined.

The good news is that many campuses are uniquely positioned for this expanded engagement of diversity. They are dots of blue in an ocean of red. These others are all around them, often working food service and taking out the garbage for the students gathered to discuss some identities while assiduously ignoring others.

"A campus is nothing if it's not a community of considerate conversation," says my friend Jake Schrum, president of Emory and Henry College. It's high time that those of us in the diversity movement made our communities broader and our conversations more considerate. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.

"A campus is nothing if it's not a community of considerate conversation."

ously be open to her uniqueness?" he asked me.

I stifled a laugh and turned the conversation to another dimension of identity, one that I felt *really* mattered. Surely my professor friend knew that the assigned role of white people in campus diversity programs is to listen to the bigotry that people of color have experienced and apologize for the ways they have benefited from racist systems. The only time they are allowed to speak proactively is if they occupy one of the other "preferred" identities—if they are gay, or female, or have recently converted to a minority religion.

In the weeks since Donald Trump was elected president—in between being scared out of my mind about the violent attacks on ethnic and religious minorities in America (my kids' names are Zayd

In this time of uncertainty and fear, LEAVE A LEGACY OF HOPE

I woke up Nov. 9 to the sound of my daughter and granddaughter crying in the next room. The future that greeted us that morning was very different from what we had hoped for. We grieved.

But then I went to work. For the past 42 years, I have worked at Sojourners alongside men and women who have never wavered in their commitment to biblical justice. And we're not wavering now. Our work has never been more important.

Sojourners is doubling down, working even harder to give voice to the powerless, to create spaces of healing and safety for the marginalized, and to continue our almost half-century of promoting racial, economic, and environmental justice. My entire adult life has been spent in this work, and I pray it continues long after me.

That legacy can be assured by including Sojourners in your will, trust, or beneficiary designation. You can pass on to future generations your own commitment to social justice, peacemaking, and environmental stewardship.

This has been my work of a lifetime. Join me and make it a part of your life—and legacy—for generations to come. —Ed Spivey Jr.

Contact Ferial Ricks at (202) 745-4645
or legacy@sojo.net,
or visit sojo.net/legacy.



Ed Spivey Jr., art director of Sojourners magazine.

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A Chorus of



Iraq war veteran Catcher Cuts the Rope, center, leads a march to a sacred burial ground at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in opposition to the planned oil pipeline.

Alyssa Schukar/The New York Times/Redux

Resistance

The resilient action at Standing Rock offers a model—
and a sign of things to come • *by* GREGG BREKKE



THE STANDING ROCK *Sioux Nation has actively opposed the construction of an oil pipeline intended to cross the Missouri River adjacent to their land since learning of the planned route in 2014. Joined first by Native American tribes from across the country, and more recently by others including military veterans and clergy, the “water protectors” scored a major victory in December when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied permits for the construction of the river crossing and, as we went to press, began examining the environmental impact of alternative routes. —The Editors*

A thin layer of smoke from dozens of campfires hung low in the air over the Oceti Sakowin camp the morning of Nov. 3. More than 500 faith leaders had assembled at the camp's sacred fire in solidarity with water protectors who have held vigil on the shores of North Dakota's Cannonball River since April.

Rev. John Floberg, supervising priest of the Episcopal churches on the North Dakota side of Standing Rock, led the gathered clergy encircling the camp's perpetual sacred fire in a ceremony of apology and repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, the papal edict issued in 1493 granting Western colonizers the right of dominion over Indigenous peoples and lands.

Leaders from faith groups that officially have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery—including Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian—joined Floberg in the speakers' area facing tribal elders, where they each read a portion of an adapted repudiation statement crafted by the World Council of Churches. Following the apology, copies of the Doctrine of Discovery were offered to the elders who were asked if they wanted to place the documents in the sacred fire. After conferring, one elder said, “This paper, these words, do not belong in a sacred fire.” They chose instead to burn the documents in vessels placed between faith leaders and tribal elders.

Members of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and thousands of supporters assembled here to oppose the Dakota Access pipeline, the 1,772-mile pipeline that was scheduled to run under Lake Oahe on the Missouri River just north of tribal lands. Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners is overseeing construction of the pipeline, which is designed to transport crude oil from the Bakken oil fields to Midwestern refineries. Though the protest originally focused on the pipeline's environmental risks, activists are also concerned about

the desecration of sacred sites and the continued violation of the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which protected Indigenous lands from exploration, extraction, and development.

The solidarity gathering came together after Floberg posted a late-October Facebook call for clergy to assemble at the camp. He initially anticipated 100 people would join; he said he was overwhelmed as the number of respondents grew beyond 500.

“We are grateful to the Standing Rock Sioux Nation for their invitation for people to come and stand in solidarity with them,” said Floberg during the gathering's introductory meeting, urging participants to conduct themselves with respect toward law enforcement and not to contribute to any acts of violence. “You are representing your faith tradition. And here, more than anything, you are representing the Standing Rock Sioux Nation. It is their reputation, their life, that will continue on long after you go.”

After the repudiation ceremony, clergy processed north from the camp to the barricaded and well-guarded bridge across the Cannonball River, with periods of song and silence. The bridge has been the site of multiple clashes between law enforcement and Native American activists. A burned-out shell of a car sat at the side of the road, and two torched trucks in the road provided a blockade across the river. Past a line of law enforcement vehicles, pipeline construction could be seen on the next set of hills.

In the unseasonably warm midday sun, faith leaders spoke words of solidarity with the people of Standing Rock, pledging support and political action.

“From the Muslim tradition, one of our most important passages is standing up for justice, even if it's against your mother or father or against yourself,” said Sahar Alsahlani from the organization Green Faith and the interfaith Fellowship





More than 500 clergy and other people of faith joined the Standing Rock gathering, including Kelly Sherman-Conroy, a seminary student and member of the Oglala Lakota nation; Episcopal priest John Floberg, convener of the clergy call for solidarity, and Rev. James Joiner of Portland, Ore. At far left, Standing Rock Sioux elders look on as copies of the Doctrine of Discovery are burned following a ceremony of apology for wrongs committed against Native peoples by the church.

Photos by Gregg Brekke

of Reconciliation. “I’m from Iraq, from the marshlands, and I’ve seen what the quest for oil and gasoline can do to an Indigenous community. I saw a replication of that happening here and definitely had to say something, because I cannot stand by and see another catastrophe happen.”

Kelly Sherman-Conroy, a Luther Seminary student and member of the Oglala Lakota nation, joined dozens of seminarians at the protest. She said her solidarity came from her upbringing, when she learned the importance of God’s creation. “We were able to integrate both our Sioux and Christian traditions together,” she said of these stewardship lessons. “My grandfather said we always need to be a voice for those who can’t speak. That’s why I’m here; to stand beside Standing Rock and to [support] the voice Indigenous people have struggled to have.”

AS THE FINAL ACT of the clergy gathering, Paul Sneve, archdeacon in the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota and a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe, led the clergy in a Niobrara Circle, a ceremony in which selected persons turn and greet each person in the circle. With more than 500 participants spread across both sides of the road, extending down into a ditch and up onto a hillside, the ceremony took 90 minutes.

Police have arrested more than 400 people as the result of protests. Earlier on Nov. 2, a group of water protectors attempted to cross the Cannonball River north of camp to pray on what has become known as Turtle Hill. Standing chest deep in frigid water, advocates were turned back by riot police dousing the crowd with pepper spray and shooting shotgun-propelled beanbags at others across the shore.

Vanessa [last name withheld], from the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe in Port Angeles, Wash., received a direct hit of pepper spray to the face. She has been at Standing Rock since August “to protect Mother Earth and the water we all live off [of].”

“We’re going to do what it takes to protect this water. As they say in the camp, *nni wiconi*, water is life. We all need it. Our children need it. Our children’s children need it. And *their* children need it,” she said, pointing to officers stationed at the top of Turtle Hill.

Later in the afternoon, a group of nearly 100 clergy and other supporters traveled to Bismarck to stage a sit-in at the judicial wing of the state capitol building. Fourteen clergy were arrested there, and

three others were arrested when they crossed the street to kneel on the lawn at Gov. Jack Dalrymple’s residence. Floberg, for his part, decried the actions in Bismarck because they weren’t authorized by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

Mike [last name withheld], a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe in Pine Ridge, S.D., who had been present at Standing Rock for two months before the November clergy gathering, said he’s willing to stay “until it’s done, until we stop that pipe.” He added that if the efforts fail to stop construction in North Dakota, he’ll go to Iowa to assist there. “We’ve got to stop it somehow. We can’t let them keep walking on us.”

Mike said the clergy gathering received the “light version” of treatment by authorities compared to that meted out to Native activists. “Because of all the clergy—if they hadn’t known you were coming, you’d have seen lines of cars and busses come down to meet you.” (In late November, police in riot gear sprayed 400 marchers with water cannons, despite freezing temperatures, and pelted the demonstrators with concussion grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets.)

Áine O’Connor, of the Sisters of Mercy in Baltimore, was one of many Catholics who joined the clergy gathering. “A very important part of coming here and following the concerns at Standing Rock over these months,” O’Connor said, “is to make very clear to the American people and those worldwide [about] the inhumane militarized response to what’s happened in relation to what’s going on here—peaceful protest, peaceful protection—people being described as rioters and criminalized.”

“It’s an opportunity to give voice, to literally practice our democracy,” O’Connor added. “To say what is going on, the rights are being violated and the earth is speaking to us, saying we can’t be silent; we need to tell what’s happening.”

The early December decision by the Corps of Engineers to deny an easement for the pipeline route across Lake Oahe—days before another pipeline in the area spilled 176,000 gallons of crude oil into a creek—is a sign that the voices gathered at Standing Rock have indeed been heard. All indications are that the chorus is just warming up. ■

Gregg Brekke, editor of Presbyterian News Service, is founder and operator of SixView Studios (sixview.com) and former president of the Associated Church Press.



Mike, a member of the Oglala Sioux, served in the Standing Rock security detail.

Scenes of celebration in early December, after the Army Corps of Engineers denied a key permit for the pipeline, putting construction on hold.





Reuters



Reuters



Heavily armed police responded to the Standing Rock participants with military-style weaponry.

Reuters

'The police are highly militarized.'

THIS TEXT SENT BY a relative at Standing Rock confirms the images we've been seeing from the Standing Rock demonstrations against the Dakota Access pipeline in North Dakota. On the evening of Nov. 20, local police with armored vehicles fired at water protectors and their allies with water cannons, tear gas, rubber bullets, and percussion grenades; hundreds were injured and several taken to the hospital.

Once again we are at the crux of legitimate protests, private corporate interest, and the use of police and military force to address the situation. Fall 2011 saw law enforcement dismantling Occupy Wall Street encampments throughout the nation, while various Black Lives Matter demonstrations from Ferguson to Baltimore have faced similar confrontation by law enforcement. In all these cases, law enforcement prioritized protection of private property.

This fall, the Morton County sheriff's department in North Dakota put its muscle behind the companies building the Dakota Access pipeline. The relationship between the use of force for the establishment of order and corporate interests being represented by the government is a tangled and messy system that has been vividly on display at Standing Rock.

The ongoing militarization of the government's responses to protests over the past five years raises the question of whether there is a legitimate role for law enforcement, including the National Guard, that does not violate the just war criterion of excessive and disproportionate force.

A number of law enforcement programs and districts are having success through the establishment of de-escalation training and principles in their ranks. By putting in place strategies that de-escalate the need for force, either from the protesters or law enforcement, space is opened for negotiations and resolution.

Military force should in no way, shape, or form be used for the protection of corporate interests, particularly over the well-being of persons. The primary goal of law enforcement in these situations ought to be de-escalation as peacekeeping for the sake of avoiding excessive and disproportionate force and for the protection of the dignity and integrity of all involved. ■

M.T. Dávila is associate professor of Christian ethics at Andover Newton Theological School. Tobias Winright, a Sojourners contributing writer, teaches theological ethics at St. Louis University.



Preaching the Devil

Proclaiming a word from beyond ourselves can set us free from our captivity.

by **WILL WILLIMON**

THE WORLD INTO WHICH we preachers cast our voices is already the world claimed, sought, and being reclaimed by Christ. For a white preacher to risk talk about race is an act of faith in the transformative resourcefulness of the Trinity. When it comes to the great divine-human contest with our sin, including our sin of racism, God will have the last word: “Come to me” conjoined with “Follow me.”

Getty Images



Out

While preaching can't do everything, God has chosen preaching as weapon of choice in the divine invasion and reclamation of creation. Theologian Richard Lischer says that Martin Luther King Jr. "believed that the preached Word performs a sustaining function for all who are oppressed, and a corrective function for all who know the truth but lead disordered lives. He also believed that the Word of God possesses the power to change hearts of stone."

Preaching is one of the means through which God defeats our natural narcissism.

Theology, not anthropology

Much of my church family wallows in the mire of moral, therapeutic deism, a "god" whom the modern world has robbed of all agency. Ta-Nehisi Coates begins his riveting *Between the World and Me* by announcing that he is an atheist. *Between the World and Me* is an honest but brutal, sorrowing, eloquent, hopeless lament for the intractability of American racism. Coates castigates those African Americans who speak of hope and forgiveness.

Eschewing metaphysics or any possibility of God, Coates is unable to plumb the depths of racist evil. Coates says that for those like him who "reject divinity," "there is no arc ... we are night travelers on a great tundra ... the only work that will matter will be the work done by us." In his despair, Coates is right: Facing racism without God—with no hope but the work "done by us"—is hopeless. Then he equivocates, saying, "Or perhaps not."

Christians answer to a sacred vocation whereby we must demonstrate to an unbelieving world, by our little lives and in our pitiful churches, that, in spite of us, there is hope because God is able.

As I said in a sermon, Jesus loves us enough to expect of us not only love but also fruit:

On his way to the cross, Jesus pauses to curse a fig tree (Mark 11:12-14). Walking past a fig tree in leaf, he notes that the tree bears no fruit. Mark comments that, "It was not the season for figs." Refusing to praise the tree's foliage, Jesus curses the tree. Why curse a tree for having no figs when it's not the season for fruit? The next day, Jesus and his disciples walked by the fig tree that yesterday Jesus cursed—even though it was not the season for fruit—and yesterday's healthy tree has withered. If you're a fig tree, better pray for fruit, because

if you are unfruitful (in spite of the season) Jesus will curse.

A district superintendent told me about a church that was, like most United Methodist churches, comprised mostly of older folk. A member's granddaughter brought a friend with her to church. Her friend was of a different race than everybody else in the congregation. The next week the grandmother received a call from a fellow member of the congregation: "I hope that your granddaughter is not planning to bring her little friend back next Sunday. It's not that I am prejudiced, it's just that I am sure the little girl and her family would be happier elsewhere." The little girl never again visited the church, nor did the grandmother or her granddaughter. They got the message; it's not the season for harvesting fruit. Less than one year after this event, the superintendent had the melancholy task of reading out that

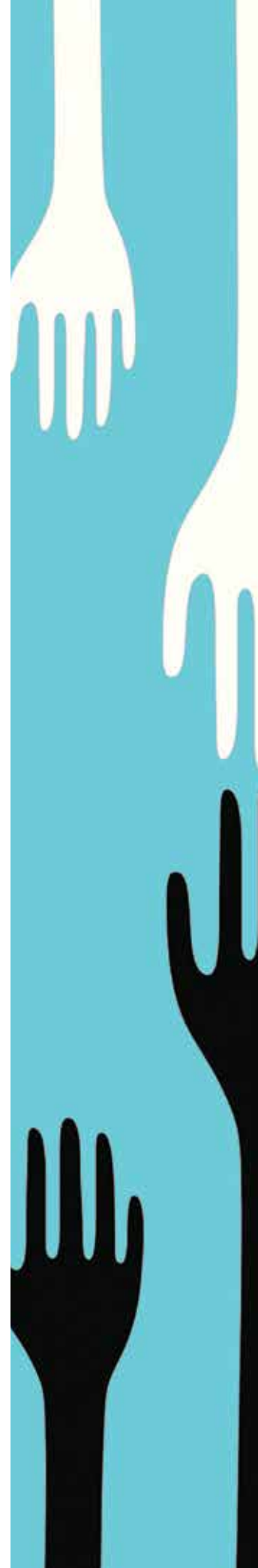
Affluent, self-satisfied folks prefer to be a bit less miserable than saved.

church's closure. "Jesus is not nice to a church that refuses to be his church," said the superintendent, shaking her head in sorrow.

My denomination is over 90 percent white. We half-heartedly tried to solve on a general church level the problem of racism that is most effectively addressed within the local congregation. Our bishops issued pronouncements on race rather than encouraging individual pastors to preach on race. Why would Jesus demand fruit from us, even in an age when a conversation about race is "out of season"? He must have enough faith in us to believe that, with his help, we could become fruitful. Lack we faith that Jesus can make us fruitful?

Preachers are not permitted to acquiesce to our racism or that of our congregations because God in Christ has not given up on us. Christ is more than a model for better preaching; he is the unsubstitutable agent of proclamation.

We work not alone. Christ wants us to succeed at our evangelistic task. Our assignment as preachers is to invite, cajole, and to welcome people into "the kingdom he has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races." Preaching "works" because Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is determined to get back what belongs to God.



A vertical illustration on the left side of the page shows several hands of different colors (white, light blue, dark blue, black) reaching upwards, symbolizing prayer or seeking help.

Exorcism

In *Resisting the Powers*, Chuck Campbell speaks of preaching in the face of powers such as racism as “exorcism”: “Don’t many folks—preachers included—long to be set free from the powers of death that have us in their grip and won’t let us go—powers from which we cannot seem to free ourselves no matter how hard we try? After all, this is the key characteristic of demon possession: We are no longer agents of our own lives, but go through the deadly motions dictated to us by the powers of the world that hold us captive ... we need a word from beyond ourselves to set us free from our captivity.”

The challenge is for us to move beyond being nonracist to being actively anti-racist, always remembering that “We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spir-

and interiority, presenting the Christian faith as a therapeutic technique for acquiring personal, individual meaning and joy in life? A narcissistic faith turns away from the crucified, bodily present Christ who is active here, now, judging the powerful, forgiving sinners, suffering with the oppressed, and rising in defeat of oppression.

Preaching, not therapy

Affluent, self-satisfied folks prefer to be a bit less miserable than saved. Rather than risk sermons that require a dying and rising savior to succeed, we forsake Christ’s mission to the world and content ourselves with mostly therapeutic, interior concerns and psychological advice to help the mildly afflicted white middle class face their anxieties with a positive attitude. Some of the stress and anxiety we are attempting to soothe is brought on by white people realizing that they

Preaching—casting out demons, going head-to-head with the principalities and powers—is a more interesting way to expend one’s life than therapy.

itual powers of evil in the heavens. Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand” (Ephesians 6:12-13).

That’s why it’s not enough for us to share our personal story or to exhort the congregation to greater striving for justice. “We don’t preach about ourselves. Instead, we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5). In Campbell’s words, “We need a word beyond ourselves to set us free.”

When mainline Protestant preachers succumbed to the error of thinking that America was a basically Christian culture, that one became Christian by being fortunate enough to be born in the U.S., there was no need for teaching sermons or for invitation to metanoia (repentance and transformation). Church degenerated into a place we go to bolster our belief that we don’t need metanoia because America is the Kingdom of God. That’s why most preaching in my church family is in the evocation mode—evoking better attitudes and behavior in basically nice people who are urged, in the sermon, to be a bit nicer.

Should we be surprised that a racially accommodated church reduces Christian worship to the cultivation of various sorts of subjectivity

are losing some of their privilege. Some of the stress and fear may be induced by a righteous God! Jeremiah condemned those false prophets who “heal wounds lightly” rather than preach judgment and repentance (Jeremiah 8:11).

Theologian James Cone asks why white theologians obsess over theodicy, “asking why God permits massive suffering, but they hardly ever mention the horrendous crimes whites have committed against people of color.”

Though therapeutic deism takes the guts out of preaching, thanks be to God, Truth, smothered by therapeutic mush, will rise. Preaching—raising the dead, casting out demons, going head-to-head with the principalities and powers—is a more interesting way to expend one’s life than therapy.

We clergy must acknowledge not only our privilege but our empowerment by God and the people of God, take authority, and use the grace that’s given us, confident that God’s word will not come back empty (Isaiah 55:11). ■

Will Willimon, professor of the practice of Christian ministry at Duke University Divinity School, is author of Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism (February 2017, Abingdon Press), from which this is adapted with permission.

Where Protestantism WENT WRONG

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation calls for repentance as well as celebration • by WESLEY GRANBERG-MICHAELSON

The German National Tourist Board has fallen in love with Martin Luther. In 1517, he nailed 95 theses protesting Catholic Church practices to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, an act considered the start of the Protestant Reformation. In honor of the 500th anniversary of this event, a 36-page tourist board brochure outlines eight different routes you can take through Germany featuring “36 authentic Luther sites” with itineraries offering “surprises aplenty.” They’ve even produced a Luther Playmobil figure for ages 4 through 99.

Reformation anniversary observances officially started in October in Lund, Sweden, with an ecumenical worship service convened by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican, attended by Pope Francis. Since then, countless events, conferences, exhibitions, and observances are being held not just in Germany but around the world as we approach the official anniversary day, Oct. 31, 2017.

But what exactly should we Christians do on this 500th anniversary of the Reformation? Celebrate? Commemorate? Confess? Or repent?

The impact of the Protestant Reformation, combined with the advent of the Gutenberg Bible and the dramatic increase in printed literature and literacy in Europe, produced revolutionary changes in religion and society. As the German tourist board exclaims, “trade, industry, art, architecture, medicine, and technology flourished like never before.” A

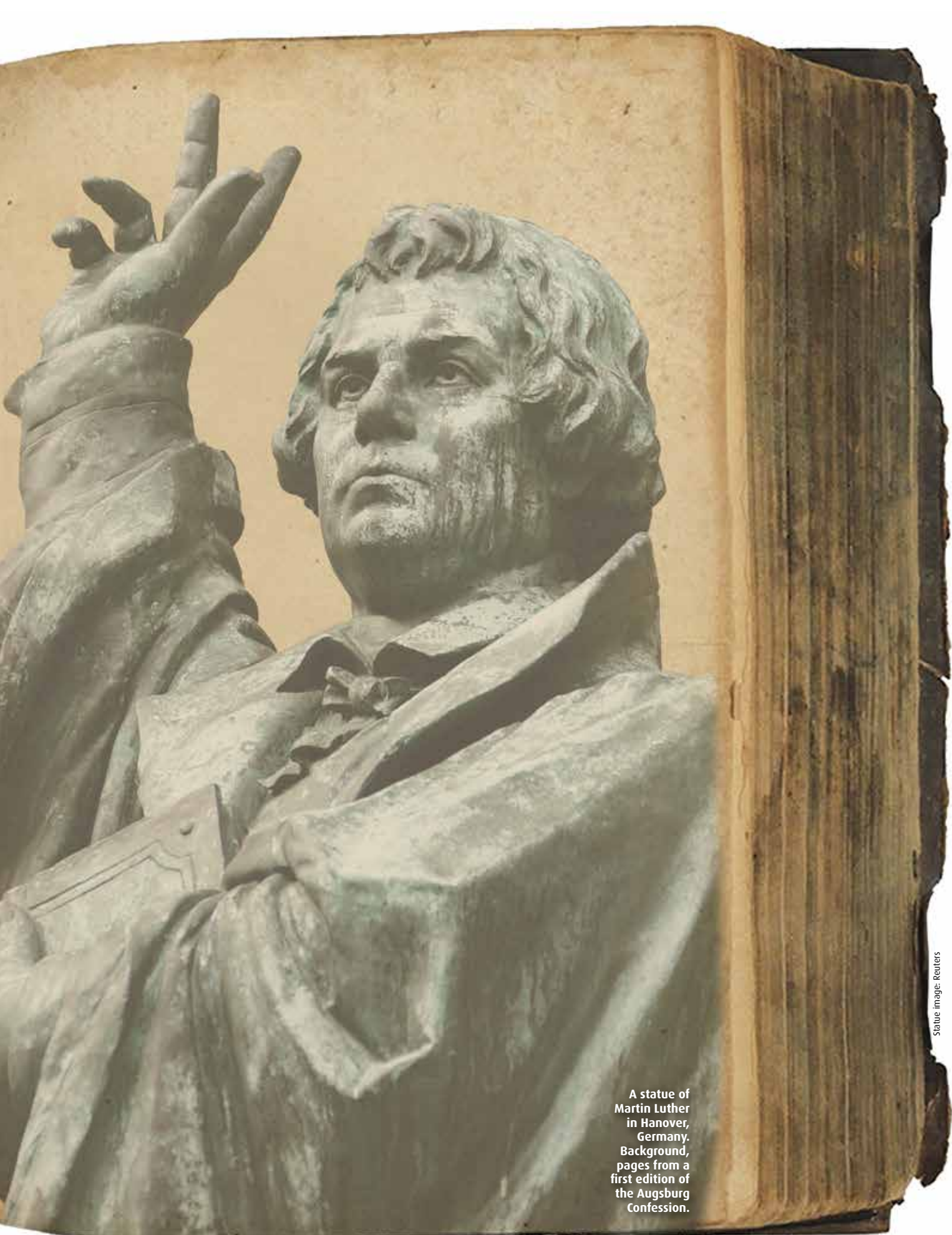
glowing narrative of the Reformation’s impact on the church and Western culture tends to dismiss any words of thoughtful critique.

It’s indisputable that the inspired actions of Luther and other reformers challenged the foundational authority of the established church with the power of God’s Word, the efficacy of God’s grace, and the direct access of believers to God’s truth, changing fundamentally the structure and governance of the church. Authority in the church had become hopelessly corrupted, epitomized by the sale of indulgences, but also thoroughly compromised by avarice, greed, and prelacy, muting any resonant witness to the message and values of the gospel. Luther’s protest saved the church from itself. As one who led a Protestant denomination with roots deeply embedded in this historical movement, I gratefully claim the Reformation’s achievements.

But it also had unintended consequences that injured the church’s life and witness, continuing to this day.

A splintering church

First, the Reformation established the precedent that a group of believers, convinced of God’s revealed truth and its demands in specific circumstances, could break away from the authority of the church, and even denounce it as heretical, establishing their own separate church structure. This practice has become so commonplace, and so prolific, that we barely give it a second theological or biblical thought.



Statue image: Reuters

A statue of Martin Luther in Hanover, Germany. Background, pages from a first edition of the Augsburg Confession.

The Reformation had unintended consequences that injured the church's life and witness, continuing to this day.



Looking at world Christianity's landscape, the reality is that what we confess as "the one holy catholic and apostolic church" has, in fact, become endlessly and ceaselessly divided into separate denominations.

Here's our present shameful and sinful state of affairs: Today, there are an estimated 43,800 denominations in the world, often living with sectarian distrust and judgment of one another. This staggering proliferation of divided institutionalized churches never could have been imagined in the first 1,500 years of Christian history. Despite the significant accomplishments of the ecumenical movement over the past 60 years, today we still assume impunity for ongoing actions that continue to sever the Body of Christ and disobey the consistent, clear, repeated biblical commands to reconcile divisions and live together in unity. This is a legacy of the Reformation.

Neglecting the inner life

Second, as Richard Rohr once said to me, "The Reformation focused on the individual but missed the inner life." The individual's ability to know, think, and believe for him or herself, rather than having the terms of faith dictated and mediated through the authority of the church, became primary. But as the Reformation spread, especially into northern Europe and England, faith became codified in creeds and confessions requiring the intellectual consent of the individual believer.

At the same time in the turbulent 16th century, practices focused on reviving and deepening one's inner spiritual journey were growing in the Catholic Church, particularly seen in Spanish mystics such as John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatian spirituality in particular—with its practices of retreat, spiritual direction, detachment, "examen" of consciousness, finding God in all things, and union with Jesus—became a framework for deepening interior spirituality. But as this movement, and the emerging Jesuit order, became part of the Counter-Reformation, it all was rejected by the Protestant Reformers.

Certainly, other forms of piety emerged within the widening and splintering world of the Reformation. Historians argue that hymnody, for example, played a central role. Yet an emphasis on rational articulations of

right doctrine often prevailed, even to this day, combined with a suspicion toward "Catholic" practices of spirituality, which were frequently alleged to be another form of "works righteousness." It has taken the crossover success of Catholic writers such as Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen to open the Protestant world to rich spiritual practices that were long ignored. It's only in the last 30 years that contemplative prayer, spiritual direction, detachment, intentional retreat, and the examen have emerged in the lexicon and experience of Protestants.

Rejecting art and beauty

Third, the Reformation bred a mistrust of aesthetics. This is particularly true of those branches following Calvin, and certainly Zwingli. One sees it most in architecture and worship style. Reformed church buildings shunned art, rejecting the "idolatry" they saw practiced in the unreformed church. Walls were blank. The focus was on the pulpit, to hear the words of the Word. The emphasis, here again, was on right articulation of doctrine. "Smells and bells" were dismissively forgotten.

In some ways, protecting the church from the influence of art and aesthetics derived from a strong division between the spiritual and the material worlds. The appendix to *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship* even declares, "no place is capable of any holiness." This reflexive desire to keep matter and spirit detached from one another continues to infect much of Protestant thinking. The more recent movements toward liturgical renewal, including even sensory-saturated worship, as well as the recovery of liturgical arts and dance within mainline and evangelical congregations, can be understood as finally rejecting the Reformation's war on aesthetics.

Distrusting individual leaders

Fourth, the Reformation poisoned how we understand religious leadership. "Papists" became the derogatory term for those whom the Reformers opposed. The actions of corrupt, craven, and desultory bishops, including the Bishop of Rome, convinced many Reformers that no sole individual should be trusted with religious authority. For most branches of the Reformation, this created forms of polity and governance that placed

authority in councils, committees, synods, conferences, or other groups. At their core, these methods of governing the church are based on the mistrust of any leadership vested in a person.

The wisdom of such a corrective is obvious. But it also has its deficiencies. Sociological wisdom shows that any group has some persons who function in a leadership capacity. When such leadership is not identified, there's no method of accountability, which frequently results in covert attempts to exercise influence and authority, resulting in dysfunction and chaos.

So the Reformation implanted a distrust of any personalized leadership within historic Protestantism. But even John Calvin was not against bishops in principle—he was simply opposed to the corrupt bishops he witnessed. The challenge 500 years later, for Protestants and Catholics alike, is how to affirm the gift of leadership but also hold it firmly accountable in the collegial governance of the church.

Into the future

Martin Luther never intended to break completely from the established church; he desired its reform. But power was threatened, and positions became polarized. Recent decades of theological dialogue have minimized those differences, which some now call "misunderstandings." But they were costly. The antagonism generated by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to the 30 Years War a century later, killing 20 percent of the German population.

Yet the Reformation also began the process of separating the church from the political authority and military power of the state, which originated with the Roman emperor Constantine the Great in the fourth century. That challenging process continues today. As this 2017 anniversary year begins, the whole church would be well advised to strengthen the best effects of the Reformation, but also repent from its worst. ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, author of From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church, was general secretary of the Reformed Church in America for 17 years. He has long been active in ecumenical initiatives such as the Global Christian Forum and Christian Churches Together.

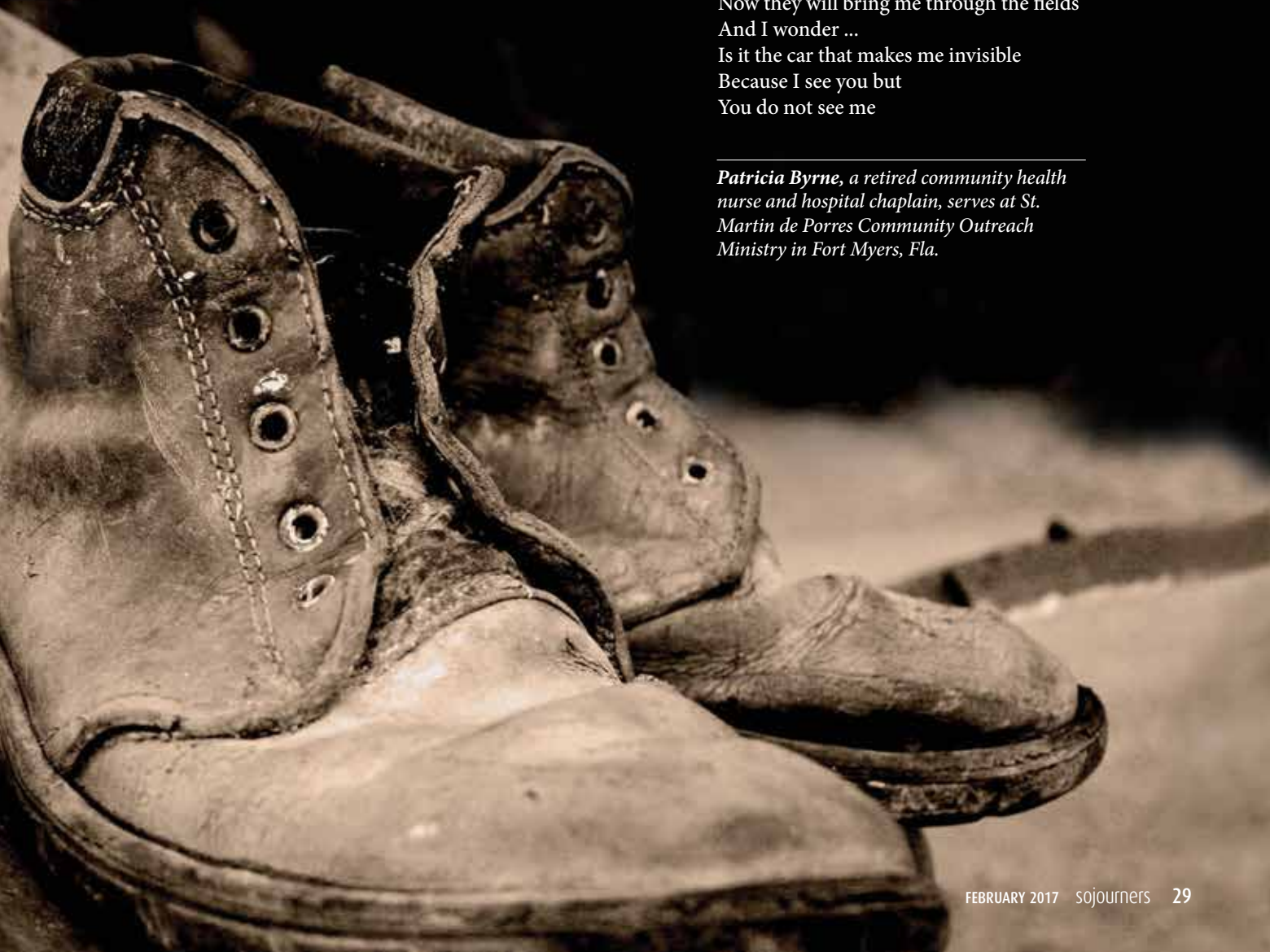
The Immigrant

I see you but you do not see me
 I am made invisible by your special powers
 Not mine. I have no power.
 Your shiny car passes me
 It does not have a speck of dirt
 But I am filthy
 Only my sweat shines at the bus stop
 As it did today in the fields
 I smell like dirt
 I know you are not hungry
 Because I see you in your red car
 Driving to a fancy restaurant
 You do not know I am hungry
 Because you cannot see me
 I had no lunch today
 My belly hurts

Creative Commons photo

But you cannot hear my emptiness
 You only hear the music in your car
 I see you but you do not see me
 Perhaps all of me was left
 In the woods where I slept last night
 Or maybe the mosquitoes sucked my life away
 One by one as they found me on the ground
 Because I had no blanket to cover me
 So I itch. They saw me though you do not.
 I dream of home. My mother and my sisters
 Hungry, waiting for the money I will send for food.
 "America ... you will make lots of money
 Our stomachs will be full
 And your sisters will have shoes"
 I hope my boss pays me this week
 I look at my boots
 These boots took me 15 days through the desert
 Now they will bring me through the fields
 And I wonder ...
 Is it the car that makes me invisible
 Because I see you but
 You do not see me

Patricia Byrne, a retired community health nurse and hospital chaplain, serves at St. Martin de Porres Community Outreach Ministry in Fort Myers, Fla.





Decolonizing the

It must have been an odd thing,

being the Holy Roman Emperor in June 1530, making the long trek to the Bavarian city of Augsburg to meet with a league of rebel states. But this is where Charles V found himself. Stranger yet, he was doing this not to convince these leaders to form a military alliance (though he was hoping to confirm their military fealty), nor to advocate for trade deals or relish the verdant Bavarian countryside.

Instead, the most powerful man in Europe had come to talk theology, with the hope that he could reunite a church fractured by the teachings of a rebel monk and a novice professor a mere 13 years earlier, in 1517. A monk who had since been condemned for heresy and treason in the 1521 Edict of Worms, but who—thanks to his ruler, Frederick III of Saxony—had nonetheless been hiding safely in plain sight ever since.

That wily monk, of course, was Martin Luther.

Thankfully, Luther and his supporters were relegated to the imperial backburner after the Diet at Worms, an imperially sanctioned assembly of the Holy Roman Empire, as global political matters and internal quibbling between testy royals kept Charles busy between 1521 and 1529. So the “Lutherans,” as they began to be called, took advantage of those years to thoroughly educate the priests and populace of Saxony about the most central of Luther’s teachings—the Doctrine of Justification: People “cannot be justified

before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4).”

This, the most virulent germ of all Lutheran theology, spread throughout Germany with alarming speed. For a people burdened with the fear that only their actions could save them from damnation—the money they tithed, the Masses they bought, the pilgrimages they took—it was liberating to learn that faith in Christ’s resurrection and the promise of God’s eternal love alone sufficed to save the soul and to save the whole world. Those transformed by this were eager to share the word.

But the emperor’s eyes soon turned eastward to Germany when the Ottoman Empire started marching his way again. A military man, Charles knew that the

Church

In the Augsburg Confession, activists see the key to Lutheranism that better reflects the diversity of its people.

by **FRANCISCO HERRERA**

rebellious Saxon princes who supported Luther were ostensibly his first line of defense against the Turkish army. He aimed to use a military alliance with the Saxons as a way to smooth relations between the German Reformers and the Vatican. To do this, in January 1530 he announced yet another imperial diet.

However, the Lutheran delegation had a different agenda, hoping to use the gathering in Augsburg to make a systematic presentation of the rightness of their ecclesial and civic reforms. They asked Luther and his associates, including a mild-mannered systematics professor named Philipp Melanchthon, to prepare something that could be read before the emperor and assembly, something that would make plain their claim to universal Christian orthodoxy as well as elucidate the reforms they had implemented. For about three months Luther and Melanchthon, along with Justus Jonas and Luther's confessor, Johannes Bugenhagen, revisited earlier doctrinal statements, wrote letters, and leavened in new insights while Melanchthon compiled and systematized everything. This goulash of theo-political passions eventually produced what we now know as the Augsburg Confession.

The confession was read before the emperor and the court at Augsburg that summer, and Charles received a personal copy composed in exquisite Latin. The Holy Roman Emperor was not moved.

Nevertheless, since 1530, the Augsburg Confession has been part of the indispensable foundation for virtually every Lutheran community on the planet, and despite being almost 500 years old, it still has quite pressing relevance and application.

Reclaiming the reforming Spirit

Now this is where I talk a bit about me and my peeps.

Last April, a group of Lutheran friends and colleagues began a movement to reform and adapt our beloved confessional communion for our own time and place. Calling ourselves #decolonizeLutheranism, we have elevated the Augsburg Confession as a central text, both for its historical importance and to highlight our conviction that the same radically reforming Spirit that guided the confession's original authors has also been guiding us. As such, the document gives us a vital link with our confessional heritage, but also a firm theological beachhead from which we announce our protest against much of contemporary Lutheranism in the United States—a beachhead centered primarily upon Article VII, "On the Church."

"The church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered," it reads. "And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and

“**Or** is it necessary that rites
or ceremonies should be
everywhere alike.” —Augsburg Confession

the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by [people], should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:5-6).”

In the United States, most of the emphasis on Article VII has been on preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, and rightly so. But since many Lutherans put up strange roadblocks to what it means to be numbered among “the congregation of the saints,” they constrain the fullest reach of the gospel as well as truncate who is even *around* to partake in the sacraments. At no point when Melancthon was writing about the “congregation of the saints” did he mention anything about skin color or language. Nor did he ever write about cerebral palsy or deafness, incarceration or addiction, or gender or sexual orientation as characteristics that would deny someone their God-given membership in the congregation of the saints. But these exclusions happen so often as to almost be a rule.

Furthermore, if Article VII makes it plain that it is not necessary for rites or ceremonies to “be everywhere alike”—things such as music and worship styles, food, and cultural expressions such as clothing and adornment—why are these so often presented as markers of Lutheranism and, as such, necessary for orthodoxy? Why is the passionate,

unrestrained joy of the black church so often met with uncomfortable shrugs in so many white Lutheran churches, or 20-minute peace-sharing sessions among *luteranos latinos* talked about by many Lutheran pastors as “too much?” And why would a seminarian of Middle Eastern descent be told that, to be ordained, he has to “act like a Norwegian Lutheran pastor”? How is it possible, in these days, that cultural and ethnic biases that actually go *against* our most central confessional document are actually considered signs of confessional fealty?

Those of us in #decolonizeLutheranism seek to engage the Augsburg Confession as one might engage an iron crowbar: prying open the gates of our earthbound communion, which so many Lutherans in our country have barred shut, defending the hegemony of the white, rich, straight, cisgender, and able-bodied majority who control the lion’s share of the church’s money and power. For these acts of exclusion, #decolonizeLutheranism calls all Lutherans to account.

We in #decolonizeLutheranism also call *ourselves* into account. Since many among our leaders and supporters have suffered under the many phobias lurking in our own pews, we understand that by lifting up the Augsburg Confession we are likewise embracing a document that has been used as a tool of white supremacy and domination, used to give a religious patina

to the subjugation of people's lives and land in the name of freedom and progress. We admit to and repent of the pain to which this document has contributed.

We are confident that Luther himself would have agreed with us. After all, didn't he launch the first thesis of the Reformation with the reminder that Jesus has intended "the entire life of believers should be one of repentance"? This repentance has unleashed among the members of #decolonizeLutheranism a great love that is transforming us to become catalysts for the creation of a church that we have always wished for and sought. We have begun to ask ourselves, "Who is not among us?" and "When people come to our table, what are we doing to make sure that they are seen, welcomed, and loved?" Then we throw ourselves headlong into welcoming and loving.

Many Lutheran churches, and many Christian churches in general, are far from representing the diversity of the United States. The Holy Spirit has called #decolonizeLutheranism to work on this, and we are answering as faithfully as we can. The congregation of the saints deserves it. And the call of the gospel demands it. ■

Francisco Herrera is a Ph.D. student at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. He blogs at loveasrevolution.blogspot.com and is the convener of decolonizeLutheranism.org.

Why

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that, to be ordained,
he has to "act
like a Norwegian
Lutheran pastor"?



A Church Under Siege

In Syria and throughout the Middle East, Christians have remained faithful in the face of violence and even genocide.

by MAE ELISE CANNON

STANDING ON A rooftop overlooking the devastation of Beirut in 1989, Nora Haddad* had determined to commit suicide.

More than a decade into the 15-year Lebanese civil war, 18-year-old Haddad had witnessed the devastation firsthand. Born in Lebanon and raised in a family that was nominally Catholic, she became disgusted by the violence among religious factions that prevailed during the war. “Christians were the most cruel—they were often the worst,” she says. “How could I believe God existed when even animals were living better than us?”



**Destruction inside St. Mary's Church
in a rebel-held area outside of
Damascus, Syria, regularly targeted
by government air strikes.**

Sameer Al-Dourmy/Getty Images

Haddad waited on the balcony for a missile to come and kill her. She asked God, “If you are there, show me something through your Word.” She says God led her to Romans 8:31: “If God is for us, who is against us?” Shortly thereafter, a stranger came to her door and began to tell her about Jesus. After hearing the message of salvation in Christ, she says, she knew there was hope.

Haddad became a disciple. In 1997, her journey led her to Syria, where she has become one of the most influential leaders of an evangelistic movement that endures amid the refugee crisis and the genocide of Christians and other minorities in the region.

Challenges in Syria

Less than 10 percent of people in Syria are Christians, including Orthodox, Uniate, and Nestorian sects. Life for Syrian Christians under the Assad regimes has been challenging in many ways. During the reign of former president Hafez al-Assad, overt proselytization was not legal.

“If you evangelized, the penalty was death,” Haddad says. “If you were not put to death, you could be arrested, and your family would never know what prison you were in or what had happened to you for years.”

Countering the misconception that Muslims were the ones persecuting Christians in Syria, Haddad describes life for Christians under the senior Assad regime as comparable to life under communism in the former Soviet Union. Many in the recognized churches in Syria—Assyrian, Baptist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, and Alliance, along with Orthodox and Catholic—did not engage in evangelism and outreach ministries for fear of causing problems with the government, which usually provided their electricity, water, and other municipal services.

Since Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000, his brutal dictatorship has had devastating effects on both Christians and Muslims. Since the conflict began in 2011, as many as 386,000 Syrians have been killed and 4.8 million have fled the country. An additional 6.5 million people are internally displaced within Syria. According to the relief and development agency World Vision, half of those affected are children. Those remaining in Syria after five years of brutal civil war have few places to turn for safety, security, and opportunities to live freely.

The years of Bashar al-Assad’s regime have been fraught with violence, displacement, and brutal actions, leading the Syrian people into the bloodiest civil war in modern history. Yet, despite the political challenges and realities of ongoing war, Christians have the reputation of “supporting” the Assad regime. Such support is more often a utilitarian compromise than an endorsement of government policies. Many Christians describe life under the current Assad regime as better than under his father’s rule—because of government protections against Islamic extremists and other resistance groups that are hostile to Christians, many Syrian believers seek safety in government-controlled areas. This on-the-ground reality

Many refugees would rather remain in the region, where they can stay connected to their cultural ties.

gives many Syrian Christians a different perspective on Assad than his well-deserved global reputation as a brutal dictator engaging in war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons against his own people.

Evangelism has been a core pillar of the Syrian church since the first century. The Syrian city of Antioch (now part of Turkey) was the third largest city in the Roman Empire at the time of the Apostle Paul. The Christian community there began when followers of Jesus scattered from Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 11:19-21). Antioch was where followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). It is believed that the church in Syrian Antioch grew in its first decade to be even larger than the church in Jerusalem.

One of the most successful Christian campaigns in Syria over the past several years was the production and screening of the 2009 film *Damascus*, about the roots of Christianity and the conversion of St. Paul. Haddad and her husband were leading contributors to its creation and distribution. Undeterred by limited financial resources, they sought out actors in the Middle East who were willing to make the film for free.

High-ranking Muslim actors and clerics supported the project. Only three of the 109 cast members in the film were Christians. President Assad attended a screening at the Damascus Opera House. The premiere drew more than 1,200 people, including influential Muslim clerics, politicians, and government officials. Campus Crusade for Christ, which sponsored the film, distributed Bibles to everyone in attendance.

Refugees on our doorstep

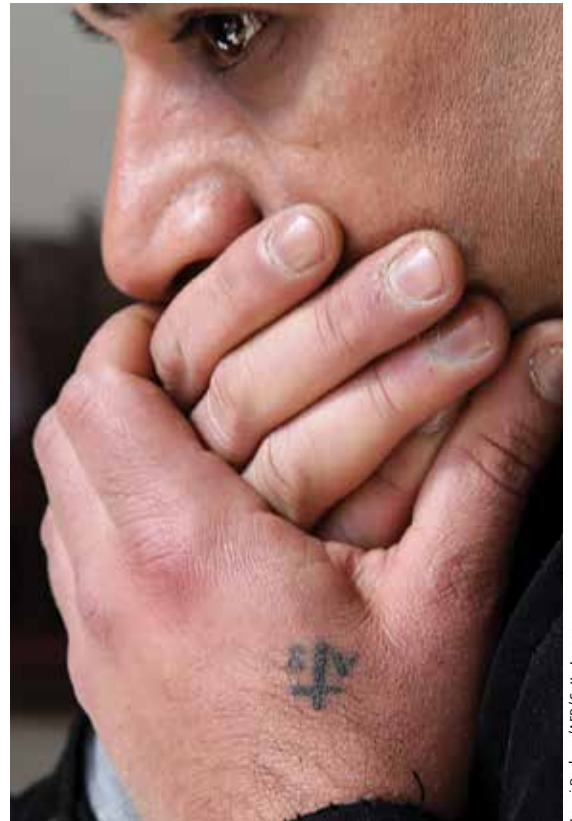
Chris McQueen, the European Evangelical Alliance’s refugee point person in Turkey, describes how his ministry has changed since the rise of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL: “Refugees are now on our doorstep, and work among them can become all-consuming.”

Most refugees fleeing Syria are Muslims, and the vast majority have remained in the Middle East, especially in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Most Christian refugees have relocated to Lebanon. While media attention has focused on the European refugee crisis, only slightly more than 10 percent of Syrian refugees have fled to Europe. Some international development organizations claim efforts to resettle refugees outside the Middle East are misguided. Representatives from World Vision and Oxfam assert that many refugees are simply seeking a safe environment for their families and would rather remain in the region, where they can stay connected to their language and cultural ties.

These displaced families have lost everything, McQueen says. “They are waiting. Waiting for homes, for a new life. They are being discriminated against. Their lives are hard. And they are people just like you and me.”

World Vision, one of the most active Christian development groups in the region, notes that the average time of displacement for a refugee family is 17 years. Refugee families need stability, opportunities for work, and a place where they can have a life and a future. Thus aid agencies advocate efforts that increase the sustainability of Middle Eastern refugee communities within the region. They call on the international community to address the root causes of the violence and to lobby their governments to support a negotiated settlement.

A displaced Assyrian Christian, who left his hometown because of ISIS attacks, takes part in a prayer service at a Greek Catholic church outside Damascus.



Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty Images

War has decimated the economy of Syria, causing a long-term humanitarian crisis affecting access to food, clean water, health services, shelter, and other basic needs. While traveling in the region in October 2015, Rich Stearns, president of World Vision U.S., met Abir, a Syrian refugee who had resettled in Lebanon after being shot in the leg by a sniper. With the gunshot wound still healing, Abir and her five daughters walked eight hours to escape the country. She doesn't know if her husband, who remained in Syria, is dead or alive. Now living in a refugee camp, Abir says her daughters ask her to "get them out of this prison." With food shortages and only \$21 per person per month from the World Food Program, daily survival is a challenge. "We cannot plan for more than today," Abir says. "We live hour by hour."

Stearns encourages U.S. Christians to respond: "Loving a refugee as our own child would mean America's 350,000 churches would be showering refugees with compassion, challenging politicians who refuse to help them, and showing the world the love of Jesus."

The problem of ISIS

While World Vision and others respond to the growing refugee crisis, debate continues in Washington about an effective response to Syria's Assad regime and to the problem of ISIS and other militant groups in the region. President Obama authorized targeted airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but counterterrorism efforts are largely unaccepted in the region, both by civil society and experts engaged in international development and humanitarian relief efforts.

Frances Charles, who works on World Vision International's Syria response team based in Amman, Jordan, says, "All parties of the conflict believe that peace in Syria won't be achieved by bombing ISIS targets in Syria." Charles and other policy analysts assert that coalition airstrikes actually result in an escalation of violence from ISIS and other militant groups, which has devastating effects on the civilian population.

On May 5, 2016, more than a dozen churches and faith-based organizations sent a letter to the Obama administration about U.S. engagement in the Middle East. The letter stated: "We believe the role of U.S. military assistance and arms trade is a major

factor in fueling a downward spiral of militarization, dehumanization, and destruction of lives and livelihoods across the region." Yet in mid-June, 51 State Department diplomats signed an internal memo urging the United States to carry out military strikes against the Assad government.

Asked about the prospect of increased military intervention against the Assad regime, Haddad responds with great emotion: "More bombs would be the most cruel fate ... We would be hostages caught in the middle of different parties at war."

ISIS and other resistance groups often target Christians specifically because of their association with Western agencies and interest groups and their rejection of the tenets of Islam. International Christian groups such as the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative have supported identifying as genocide the killing and violent treatment of Christians, Yazidis, and other minority groups by ISIS. On March 17, 2016, the State Department confirmed that massacres by ISIS amounted to genocide, as defined by the U.N. Convention—that is, "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." This designation increases the burden on the international community to respond to the plight of religious minorities systematically killed by ISIS and other militant groups.

'Do Western Christians know we exist?'

As they continue their witness in this challenging time, Middle Eastern Christians feel isolated, in large part, from the body of Christ outside of their immediate communities. Many Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories say, "We simply want Western Christians to know that we exist." They want to be recognized and welcomed into the global body of believers while also being faithful to the gospel in their own context.

Matthew Willingham, senior field editor for the Preemptive Love Coalition in Iraq, describes how some American evangelicals

have neglected to acknowledge the body of Christ in the Arab world: "Before ISIS steamrolled eastward across the Nineveh plain, ousting Christians from Mosul and committing genocide against Yazidis, many Christian missionary organizations were sending church planters to Iraqi Christian communities with the sole purpose of converting them to said evangelicalism ... To many in the U.S., Iraqi Christians weren't *really* Christians." But after ISIS came along, these communities were more accepted and supported: "They were *absolutely* Christians, our brothers and sisters, persecuted by Islamic extremists and in need of our support." Willingham wonders whether U.S. Christian solidarity with Middle Eastern brothers and sisters will be sustained once the threat of ISIS dissipates.

Stearns, of World Vision, challenges U.S. Christians not to ignore what is happening in the Middle East. Observing that Western attention to terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels "far outweighed the concern showed to victims of bombings in Beirut and Islamabad," he wonders, "Are some lives more important than others?" ■

** For security reasons, Nora Haddad's name has been changed to protect her identity.*

Mae Elise Cannon, former senior director of advocacy and outreach for World Vision U.S., is executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace and author of *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World*.



CultureWatch
BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

By Catherine Woodiwiss

Radical Refuge

The Sanctuaries collective creates a new kind of sacred space for art and justice.

I.

My family was earthquaked

I changed the noun into a verb

because it's almost like someone did this to me on purpose ...

—Sanctuaries artist Mazaré, “Where is God in the Natural Disaster?”

OUTSIDE, A MID-NOVEMBER storm of biblical proportions is raging, but the hushed crowd gathered in this church basement is in rapt attention to a woman giving testimony. In the parking lot, a hollowed-out school bus holds the detritus of a homeless life. A hand-made “Wheel of Misfortune” dangles from one rain-splattered window, over empty bottles and voided bank notes.

Suddenly the crowd erupts in cheers, and the poet, grinning, cedes the floor to a pair of musicians. Today the church is playing host to a collaboration between *Street Sense*, a publication run by and for Washington, D.C.’s homeless community, and The Sanctuaries, a D.C.-based art, spirituality, and justice collective. The bus—filled with real experiences of D.C.’s homeless community, represented by Sanctuaries artists—will tour the city as a mobile story. It’s the culmination of months of work. To some, it’s an act of resistance. To others, it’s church.

For all the breathless predictions of what the day after Nov. 8 might bring, a reckoning

Members of The Sanctuaries, a Washington, D.C. group of artists, justice-minded activists, and spiritual seekers.



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II.

**I got a target on my body, some body,
please protect me**

—Mohammed Tall, “Do the Right Thing”

Resly wasn't always planning to become a minister, or organize for justice, though he probably always would have been an artist. When he was a high school senior, the son of Jewish and Christian parents was diagnosed with an advanced form of cancer. It was the first earthquake in his life, one he calls a “wake-up call.”

“That state of profound dependency, completely out of control, forced me to engage in the spiritual practice of surrender—to ungrip, open up your hands, connect with the hands of someone else, and invite the unexpected—the world, God—into what had been closed off.”

Resly's experience with chronic illness has shaped his approach to building community ever since. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School and former chaplain for the National Institutes of Health, Resly has played in the deep end of existence for years. He'd long envisioned a group that would blend heart, soul, and action. But it was moving to D.C. that introduced the full possibility of what has grown into The Sanctuaries.

The Sanctuaries began in 2013 with 15 to 20 members, putting on spirituality-infused open-mic nights and justice-oriented discussion groups. Resly took care to let local residents and early team members shape the specifics, and by 2013, when Black Lives Matter had entered the lexicon and police shootings were a regular news feature, it was clear there was more that The Sanctuaries could do in D.C.

“We found we had to address the question of healing—in particular, people of color, who are going through a profound struggle,” Resly says. “We didn't go into this thinking we were going to focus on the healing arts, but [current events] have opened up a new side.”

The group is a collection of artists, justice-minded activists, and spiritual seekers, but the impetus toward healing is a defining feature. The week after the Orlando shootings, The Sanctuaries had a pre-existing “soul slam” scheduled at a local theater.

Continued on Page 41

with mortality was not one of them. Yet a marked grief snaked across some newsfeeds and private emails in the days that followed—a feeling that with the election, something precious about life as we knew it had died.

That morning, the founding organizer of The Sanctuaries, Erik Martinez Resly, sent a simple note to members: “I love you.” A few improvised hours later, a small group had huddled at a church on 16th Street in D.C. to share the real-time experience of the country's historic change in direction. For The Sanctuaries, response looked like art and togetherness—two qualities that have guided the group from its beginning.

“This refrain, from a young black poet I'd heard six months ago, just kept repeating in my mind,” says Aaliah Elnasseh, a member of The Sanctuaries' improv and photography teams. “‘I got a target on my body, some body, please protect me.’ I had no idea I'd carried those words with me. And they were there, to remind me exactly of how I feel.”

New & Noteworthy



From *Why Am I Here?*

WHEREVER YOU GO ...

In *Why Am I Here?*, by Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen and Akin Duzakin, a picture book for ages 5 to 9, a child ponders the many different places she could be: a huge city, an isolated forest, a war zone, fleeing to a strange land. A book that encourages empathy and acknowledges the big questions that kids ask themselves. Eerdmans

FAITH FOR THE STRUGGLE

Shannon Daley-Harris, religious affairs adviser for the Children's Defense Fund, offers scriptural meditations to inspire and sustain advocates and nurturers in *Hope for the Future: Answering God's Call to Justice for Our Children*. Includes questions for faithful response. Westminster John Knox

NO EASY ROAD

Activist and artist Anthony Papa writes about the challenges of rebuilding his life after serving 12 years for a nonviolent drug offense, his work to change oppressive drug-sentencing laws, and memories of prison in *This Side of Freedom: Life After Clemency*. 15yearstolife.com

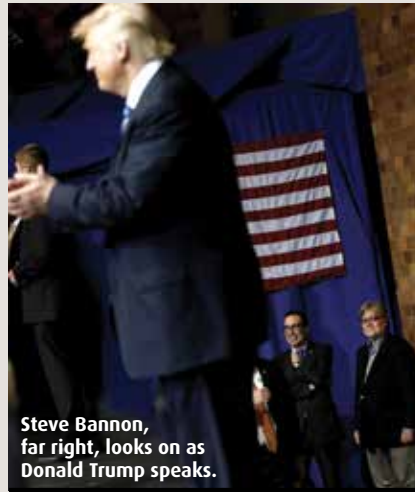
LIFE OUT OF DEATH

“I did not understand how people changed so much: Some became executioners, others became victims,” writes Holocaust survivor Magda Hollander-Lafon in *Four Scraps of Bread*, a slim volume of piercing, simple-yet-profound reflections on her journey through hell and back. Notre Dame Press

Down the Breitbart Rabbit Hole

AS HAS BEEN widely noted, when Donald Trump named Steve Bannon to head his presidential campaign, he brought into the U.S. political mainstream a set of ideas that have, for at least 75 years, been relegated to a disreputable fringe. Bannon has bounced through a number of incarnations in the past three decades—naval officer, investment banker, and film producer—before joining the ultraconservative “news” website Breitbart.com, first as a board member, then, after founder Andrew Breitbart’s sudden death in 2012, as executive chair. In that role, he took an outlet that was already at the far right edge of American politics down the rabbit hole and into the underground world of race-based nationalist theories and the politics of white resentment.

Breitbart founded his site in 2007, and it came to prominence in 2009 when the site promoted the deceptively edited hidden-camera videos that led to the demise of



Steve Bannon, far right, looks on as Donald Trump speaks.

boasted, “the platform for the alt-right.” The term “alt-right,” as we now all know, refers to a loose, mostly online network of white activists gathered around the general notion that the “white race” and its European-derived culture is slated for obliteration by the forces of globalism and multiculturalism.

The alt-right presence on Breitbart is often more implied than overt. The site’s obsession with

the Alt-Right,” by Breitbart staffers Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos. There you will find the movement’s members described as “young, creative, and eager to commit secular heresies.” Their theoreticians, you will learn, are both “dangerously bright” and “fear-somely intelligent.” According to the Breitbart authors, the various streams of the alt-right are united in their horror at “the contrast between the truly marginalized”—that is, white men—and those merely claiming victim status”—

blacks, Latinos, women, and sexual minorities.

The people frequenting the bottom of the page on Breitbart represent a real danger to U.S. democracy, not by their numbers (not yet anyway), but by their ability to apparently explain to uneducated, low-income whites the reasons why they feel ignored and exploited in a land they thought was supposed to be theirs. The alt-right sings the siren song of “white identity” and tells the disinherited of European extraction that their enemy is multiculturalism.

This, of course, steers people away from the cold hard facts of corporate globalization and forced deindustrialization that have dictated the terms of U.S. life for more than 40 years. In the end, the vast majority of Americans, of all colors, who are victimized by this economy can’t be united by mere sentiment. That will require a common project that unites people around mutual self-interest and around the conviction that this land was indeed made for all of us, and not just for the 1 percent. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel White Boy, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.

The alt-right sings the siren song of “white identity.”

the ACORN community organizing network. A little later, Breitbart was the first outlet to post the again deceptively edited videos that led to the firing of African-American U.S. Department of Agriculture official Shirley Sherrod. In 2011, Breitbart broke the story of liberal Democratic representative Anthony Weiner’s penchant for obscene self-portraits.

Then Bannon took over in 2012, and the website began to exhibit a new interest in the far right nationalist movements rising in Europe. This, coupled with a pre-existing obsession with the imagined dangers of illegal immigration, helped make the site, as Bannon later

incidents of violence by African Americans and the perfidies of Middle Eastern and African refugees in Europe is red meat for this crowd. But the white nationalists really come front and center if you scroll down to the “discussion” section below any of these stories. There, attacks on “sniveling ... social justice jew-puppets” don’t seem all that out of place.

However, the best place to look for an insider’s take on the alt-right and a demonstration of its relationship to Bannon’s Breitbart site is in the article “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to



Continued from Page 39

"I was worried it would be business as usual, about our 'collective hopefulness,'" says Ayari Marie Aguayo-Ceribo, part of The Sanctuaries' core team and a longtime Unitarian Universalist.

"Instead, an ally spoke out in a poem about what it meant to be called into action—about what had happened to *them*. One of our interns, who identifies as black and queer, ran up to the stage and just starting bawling, and hugged them. That moment ... if you want to be an ally and don't know how to do it, this is what it means."

III.

The healer met up with the reverend and ever since then we been opening doors ...

—Osa Obaseki, "*The Sanctuary*"

At first pass, The Sanctuaries is innovative: a smart brand of spirituality and justice, at a time when young Americans are leaving religion in droves and cynicism in institutions is rising. But for the drop-in visitor, it's fairly ordinary: Events are often held in drafty churches or classroom-style meeting rooms; the size of attendance at any of the offerings (soulful improv, monthly huddles, open mics) is hard to predict.

But The Sanctuaries' unique organizational philosophy is perhaps especially ripe for this moment.

"Something Rev. Erik does differently is intentionally build leadership to be a diverse group of people," Aguayo-Ceribo says. "And they lead by saying, 'What do you need?' That's very different from going to a UU church and having someone whitesplain something to you. We need these spaces. There's a call for it."

With this intentionality, The Sanctuaries is putting forth a radical idea—that a committed network of diverse people in one city can create emotional refuge; that a gathering of bodies, not a joining of walls, makes a sanctuary; that we need each other's wisdom and resources to survive.

And in a siloed city such as D.C., The Sanctuaries is proof positive of a counter-cultural heartbeat.

"When I first met Rev. Erik, he said, 'I'd love to get coffee,'" recalls Erin Johnson, an early leader with The Sanctuaries who now lives in Michigan. "And I was like, okay—in



A scene from *Moonlight*

THE BEST OF 2016

THE LONG TAIL of media availability is one of the great cultural gifts of our time: All the films on year-end "best of" lists are easily accessible to anyone with access to a screen. For me, 2016 was a year that emphasized cinematic empathy—crossing lines of difference, yearning to connect, even while national politics were keeping people apart. There were many highlights, including:

The war-on-terror moral inventory of *Eye in the Sky*, the consumer critique and diversity-affirming *Zootopia*, the redemption of old age and delightful provocation to inclusive community in *A Man Called Ove*, and the powerfully honest portrayal of young gay experience in *Being 17*. In *Life, Animated*, the link between the stories we tell and how we treat ourselves was presented to happily moving effect; *Morris from America* brought new comic life to the single parent-child folktale; *Midnight Special* did the same from a far more somber, yet no less moving perspective; and *Captain Fantastic* imagined a way to be family that challenges oppressive cultural norms without staying isolated from the world. The Coen brothers created a brilliant satire of politics and religion in *Hail, Caesar!*; and the wonderful *Pete's Dragon*, *The Little Prince*, and *A Monster Calls* each illustrated our internal conversations that either minister to or repress pain.

The unexpected box office failure of Warren Beatty's *Rules Don't Apply* shouldn't detract from it as a touching,

humane drama about healing divisions, and the individual spiritual search went deeper in *Knight of Cups* and *Last Days in the Desert*.

My top 10 of the year:

10. Hunt for the Wilderpeople. Maori kid and grumpy Kiwi find their hearts on a bush trek.

9. Hell or High Water. A modern Western that's serious about power, economics, and race.

8. Arrival. Soulful science fiction inviting us to listen.

7. Loving. The civil rights struggle as the story of just one family.

6. Queen of Katwe. A magical fable that also happens to be true.

5. Manchester by the Sea. Stark tragedy's aftermath.

4. Lemonade. Beyoncé's declaration of lament and healing.

3. Rams. Moving and hilarious Icelandic call for reconciliation.

2. Embrace of the Serpent. An astonishing journey into Amazonian mysticism, darkness, and light.

1. Moonlight. Conveying the milieu of high school tensions and romantic longing, a film that aches with trauma yet eventually sketches the possibility of hope. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

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D.C. people say that to you all the time and you sort of say, 'Oh whatever.' But he was serious! He kept asking me!"

For Johnson, who learned about The Sanctuaries from a flyer in a coffee shop in Virginia, encountering the group helped her connect vocation to profession for the first time. "I'm a lawyer. It's hard to find ways to effectuate that in daily ways—justice was never connected to anything else for me," Johnson says. "Here, I found a way."

Johnson was also exploring her sexuality at the time, a challenge for a black bisexual woman in a city, and culture, that desperately wants people to fit in expected categories. "Being in a community like Sanctuaries has helped me be honest with myself about a lot of things," Johnson says.

Elnasseh, who grew up Muslim, agrees. "Sometimes if you are a minority group, [people] want you to speak for your entire

"Sanctuary" means "place of refuge," and that has proven true for many of the individuals who have become part of the community.

community, or highlight you as, 'Look, we got this person!' At The Sanctuaries, it's normal to be yourself," she says.

"Sanctuary" means "place of refuge," and that has proven true for many of the individuals who have become part of the community. Johnson met her now-husband at The Sanctuaries. Aguayo-Ceribo found others with immigrant upbringings, for whom English is a second language. "But also, because we're so diverse, we do face limits," she says. "We will be bumping heads on how to approach our beliefs, sometimes shared, sometimes not."

"I don't know that you do human love efficiently," Resly says. "And I don't think you do dying efficiently. The most significant parts of human experience are those that often take time, that are marked with a great deal of unpredictability."

It's striking to encounter a group of millennials so energetically living at odds with

the very culture developed for their generation. Those involved speak often of trust and the importance of deep commitment to one another—two societal glues that have witnessed rapid erosion in recent years.

"I've been surprised by how many folks are coming, saying, 'I have nowhere else to go,'" Resly says. "What we do well is we are ultimately responsive—as responsive as possible. I'm not sure this is something that can be built with a blueprint."

IV.

Walk with me in solidarity ...

What do you know? There is me

—*Sanctuaries artists, "Love Reaches Out"*

In the wake of Donald Trump's election, Russian writer Masha Gessen laid out a blueprint for living under autocracy. Included was a warning: "Institutions will not save you."

The Sanctuaries isn't an institution, not yet, and its commitment to collaborative community may provide a model for organized resistance in the months and years to come. The day after the election, one leader, Osa Obaseki, sent Resly a text: "We've been preparing for this. What we've built is what's needed."

"You can't create community, do it in a truly human way, unless you've living in its throes—in the chaos and fullness of human experience," Resly says. He has been speaking to me, this whole time, from the lobby of a hospital, where he is awaiting a procedure—one more on his long journey through chronic illness, one more step to get back to how things were.

Today, The Sanctuaries lays out a spirit of ordinary ethics—a juicing down of our horizon-expanding experiences, traumatic and divine, into the service of daily connection. In that way, what The Sanctuaries is doing is religion—a visible manifestation of inefficient love at work in the world.

"Whether you use traditional or nontraditional language, both in art and activism you do not have the option to ignore the question of how you're showing up," Resly says. We end our call, and he resumes waiting, for the next change ahead. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is senior associate web editor for Sojourners.

Reviewed by Rosalie G. Riegler

NOW MORE THAN EVER

The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers, by Jim Forest.
Orbis Books.

DO WE LIVE in a post-Christian era? Catholic monk Thomas Merton thought so, back in 1962, when his anti-war book *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* was banned by monastic censors.

He would surely come to the same conclusion today, when we hear a pulpit Christianity still identified with war and nationalism and listen in shock to a new

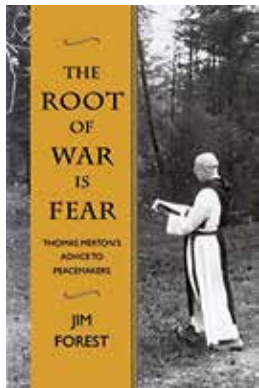
U.S. president woefully ignorant of the peril of nuclear war. Our deeply divided nation holds scant promise for peace in our streets or in the world, despite the growing chorus of Christian peacemakers.

This new book by Jim Forest adds both deep compas-

sion and timely advice to that chorus. The wise words of Merton, who served unofficially as “pastor to the peace movement” during the Vietnam War, are needed now more than ever. Clearly titled chapters quote from Merton’s published writing as well as his letters to Forest and other peacemakers.

In October 1961, *The Catholic Worker* published Merton’s essay “The Root of War is Fear,” and Merton ran afoul of monastic censors. He was eventually silenced publicly but fortunately was allowed to circulate *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* in mimeographed form and to continue writing letters, although for several years everything passed through the censor’s hands. One of the delights of this book by Forest is the first publication of an uncensored and scathingly sardonic letter Merton wrote under the pseudonym “Marco J. Frisbee.”

This slim volume gives an overview of Merton’s all-too-short life and shows that he was influenced by Gandhi years before



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entering the monastery. It also details Forest's relationship with Merton and his surprising first visit to Gethsemani—he was greeted by a Merton literally rolling in laughter. Forest and Merton engaged in an extraordinary epistolary friendship, with more letters from the searching monk to the searching young man than to anyone else.

Forest visited him several times and participated in the retreat for peacemakers at Gethsemani in fall 1964. (See Gordon Oyer's book *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, reviewed in the December 2014 *Sojourners*.)

Forest sought Merton's aid in co-founding the Catholic Peace Fellowship and confessed his discouragement in 1966 when his peacemaking efforts seemed to bear no fruit. The monk's response was the now-famous "Letter to a Young Activist," reprinted near the end of this book, first in its edited entirety and then with Forest's comments on pertinent sections.

This letter should be required reading to all peacemakers in this era of fear and questioning. The advice hardest to hear and to put into practice: "Do not depend on the hope of results." Rather, Merton writes, depend not on anything specific we do, but on "the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself." Further, he tells Forest—and us—that any good we do in the cause of peace doesn't come from our own efforts but from allowing ourselves to be used by God's love.

Hard advice indeed to progress-oriented peaceworkers. But Merton's counsel remains crucial. We must continue to act not out of fear of a malignant "other" but simply for the rightness of our acts.

A final chapter rings clearly on the title of the book and warns that we cannot make fear the mainspring of our lives, because it robs us of creativity and freedom, both qualities we will need in the next four years as we face a presidency unlike any the U.S. has known. ■

Rosalie G. Riegle is a writer and resister with deep ties to the Catholic Worker movement. Her latest oral histories are Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak out for Peace and Doing Time: Resistance, Family, and Community.

Reviewed by Shefa Siegel

A FINAL SURRENDER TO A SACRED UNDERTOW

You Want It Darker, by Leonard Cohen.
Columbia

A PERSON HAS a thousand ways of being, not just one but many selves, and Leonard Cohen embraced them all.

He sang the blues with Old World struggle, rasped epic tales and sometimes gospel, strumming Spanish chords on a broken-down guitar. But his final album, *You Want It Darker*, released a month after his 82nd birthday and only 17 days before he passed away, was like someone transcendently singing the prayer for ascension at his own funeral.

As if chanting a private liturgy, there was no more hunger for a voice. At last Cohen was the praise singer, aged and fatigued, a pilgrim with just one journey left to make. From the opening supplication—"I'm ready, my lord"—to the closing blessing—"It's over now, the water and the wine"—the album is an uninterrupted prayer unto death.

"Traveling Light," *You Want It Darker's* ecstatic peak, bids *au revoir* to the self and the soul, the lover and beloved, the human and divine. Even in old age, Cohen is still no preacher, sage, or a saint. "I'm just a fool / A dreamer who / Forgot to dream / Of the me and you / I'm not alone / I've met a few / Traveling light / Like we used to do."

Gone is the seductive blurring of sacred and profane and peeking through the curtain to glimpse the dealer's latest game. The verses slide into an older and saltier way of singing, a sacred undertow, always there in songs of love and of despair, now amplified by the kind of wordless prayer people once sang from dusk until dawn.

In an era of singer-songwriters, Leonard Cohen was often heralded for his verse. But he was a master of melody, especially when he dropped into the special sadness of this ancient mode, whose every note is a variant of the Song of Songs.

To his end of days, he said music was an unsolved puzzle, insisting he was guided by neither angels nor a muse. "If I knew where



Vevo

the good songs came from," he quipped, over and again, "I would go there more often."

More often?

Just let the canon play on an endless loop, and even the serious acolyte will soon be asking, "What is *this* marvelous song I have never heard before?"

"Reject the angel, and give the muse a kick," said Cohen's beloved Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet and playwright. "The true struggle is with the *duende*."

The angel guides and the muse dictates, Lorca explained, but *duende*—the creative spirit of earth that everyone feels but no philosopher has explained—appears only when

Leonard Cohen's creative imagination was as miraculous as it was prodigious.

the seeker is conscious that he might suddenly be devoured by ants. With death in the foreground, the seeker is worthy of his suffering and sincerity, sincerity being the key that unlocks sacred music.

Perhaps the music was as Cohen said, all toil, sweat, and mystery, like a metalworker alloying songs in silent factories. But in a world where sacred song no longer springs naturally from daily life, his creative imagination was as miraculous as it was prodigious.

At the end of *You Want It Darker*, a string quartet reprises the melody of "Anthem," whose signature verse "There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in" has rescued countless preachers furiously cribbing their sermons. It is just the melody now, graceful and serene, until we

hear a voice chanting, one exalted final line. "I wish there was a treaty, I wish there was a treaty, between your love and mine."

One wants to rise, applaud, cry out, "A thousand kisses, dear Leonard! You gave us exactly what we want!" Yet more than any verse or melody, it is something in the album's liner notes—a simple paragraph of gratitude, from a father to a son—that blows the place away.

When Cohen was unable to complete the album, his son stepped in and salvaged the project. I don't know a thing about their relations, except to say: For any father and son to be at peace, let alone enrich the world with sacred music, is not just redemptive, it is messianic. It's written in the scriptures; it's not an idle claim! "Before the coming of the great and awesome day" arrives the sage Elijah, the prophet Malachi explains, ending a war more divisive and insane than conflicts between nations—hatred between parents and children.

Even in a time when, as Cohen wrote in "The Future," the "blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold, and it has overturned the order of the soul," it is still easier for most of us to imagine geopolitical than familial peace. But what he called bringing "gratitude back to the soil" was Cohen's highest discipline, and his life, his work, and legacies are whispered messages that beauty and dignity remain the province of humanity. ■

Shefa Siegel is a research scholar in anthropology at the University of British Columbia. His previous articles for Sojourners about Leonard Cohen were "Leonard, Will You Smoke?" and "Can You Hear My Song?"



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Reviewed by Jasper Vaughn

LESSONS IN VULNERABLE LOVE

Love, Henri: Letters on the Spiritual Life, by
Henri J.M. Nouwen; edited by Gabrielle
Earnshaw. Convergent Books.

"A SUGGESTION: Speak much about Jesus." Henri Nouwen's recommendation to a friend, captured in *Love, Henri*—a new collection of his personal correspondence—encapsulates the priest and author's private and public ministry. More than almost any other modern figure, Nouwen bridged Catholic/Protestant doctrinal divides with his writing to bring spiritual healing and comfort, even as he wrestled with what he termed his inner "demons."

Edited by Gabrielle Earnshaw and released in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of Nouwen's death, *Love, Henri* highlights the priest's struggle for inner peace and his extensive web of deep friendships. While the collection does not present any shocking revelations, and contains fewer transcendent moments of raw emotion than other collections of Nouwen's writing, it works well as a meditation on what it means to love selflessly and extend oneself over a lifetime.

In the collection, Henri is both protagonist and antagonist, healing and wounding those in his life. While Nouwen himself acknowledges "a kind of enthusiasm" in his own writing that "seems a little bit too easy," the gift is watching him participate in these seeker/giver relationships. In early letters, he is often overly attached: "Maybe your distance simply means that I force myself upon you and there is not a mutuality that makes friendship possible." Later, though, we see him "speak about [his] inner struggles as a source of self-understanding" and solidarity, rather than a way "to avoid difficult positions and responsibility and evoke some sympathy."

Nouwen simultaneously condemns what he views as oppressive forces within the Catholic Church and issues strong defenses for its undivided existence. Thus, the collection contains diverse grappling: a moving cry of sympathy for a woman who has felt excluded in the Eucharist; a self-aware critique of over-romanticizing those with

disabilities; a plea for an activist to tread lightly in lambasting religion; a lament for a gay priest leaving the church.

This last letter—to Maurice Monette, who married a man and left the priesthood—presents a helpful look at Nouwen's treatment of sexuality. "The time has come for people like you and me," he says to Maurice, "to call each other to a new way of faithfulness ... that allows us to live in the church without feeling oppressed by the church." Nouwen's attitude toward his own sexuality appears as a work in progress throughout the collection. In 1988, he writes to a pastoral care leader in charge of a "reorientation" ministry for those with same-sex attraction that he has "been trying to really enter into the furnace of God's love ... to really let God heal me." Later, though, in 1995, he comforts his gay friend Everett: "Trust that Jesus loves you so much that he will send to you the man you are waiting for ... Your sexuality is your gift."

Our understanding of Nouwen is frustratingly limited in these revealing sections by one of the shortcomings of this collection: the exclusion of letters written to Nouwen. Without seeing the questions, pain, and friendship of those addressing him, the most intriguing sections of the book are often cut short. For instance, letters in 1986 reveal Nouwen's passion and romantic overtones to his friend Nathan Ball: "Your love for me has given you a knowledge of me that nobody has ever had," he writes. But then the letters stop, right at the point of their break in friendship.

The letters to Ball, as well as their gaps, speak to this collection's central inquiry: Can we be truly happy without a soulmate? "Of course," the celibate Nouwen would say; in God is found an intimacy that surpasses any human relationship. But the question is less about faith, surprisingly, and more about human companionship: Can temporary love, added up and enjoyed in different seasons from different people, equal a marriage commitment?

Earnshaw leaves the question unresolved, but the love, tenderness, and *good* exuded by Nouwen in these letters make it a joy to ponder. His life is worth examining. ■

Jasper Vaughn is the editorial assistant for Sojourners.

The Mosquito Manifesto

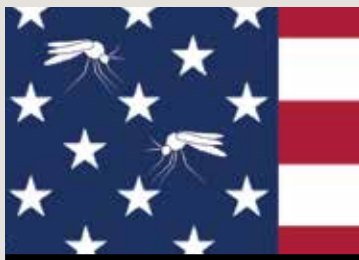
WHAT DO YOU do when the democratic process delivers the power of the presidency to an authoritarian leader with the strategic impulse control of a 2-year-old?

Here are a few responses I've observed.

OPTION 1: The Ostrich. Bury one's head in the sand until the annoyances pass. The virulent rhetoric of Mr. Trump's campaign, combined with his appointees and advisers, make this option available only to men of European decent. (White women may cover their heads, but shouldn't bury them completely.)

OPTION 2: The Spaniel. Fluff up one's coat and appear clean and eager on the doorstep of the new master. Hope for the best; hope for a bone. This option is supported by many who are well-meaning, are part of the political elite, or are dangerously naive.

OPTION 3: The Cockroach. When the light comes on, scatter into the street with a sign saying "Not My President." Or simply hide in a dark corner hoping to pass the com-



disillusioned about the state of our nation. The fundamental optimism of the "American dream" has not matched reality for at least three generations. American optimism has always been partly delusion, as evidenced by the experiences of those defined outside of it or on whose backs the "great good" was built.

An election, however, is supposed to be a tool for the nonviolent transfer and distribution of power, not a therapy session to deal with disillusionment.

For Christians, disillusionment is part of developing a mature spirituality. Authentic prayer brooks no illusions; it dismantles illusions to reveal truth.

HERE IS WHERE the sword of the Spirit slices cleanly: Are we American Christians or Christians in America?

American Christians conflate the cross and the flag, theology and nationalism. Conflict between church and state creates a cognitive dissonance. Since the state ultimately comes first, these Christians acquiesce to shifting political winds. They are defined by their inertia, their silence, their overriding desire to maintain good relations with all—even when confronted with the grave moral responsibility to give aid to the victims of nationalistic ideologies.

On the other hand, Christians in America claim "Jesus is Lord," above national interests or ethnic affiliations. Conflict

is expected between the demands of the state and one's confession of Christ. Christians in America draw strength from the spiritual, political, and cultural cutting edge of the gospel and from the body of Christ that knows no national boundaries. They are prepared to "speak truth in love," as Paul says, to the powerful. Courageous acts of solidarity with slaves, women, outsiders, and prisoners are what set them apart. Creative acts of resistance and taking a public stand in defense of the endangered are hallmarks of their faith.

Even a rekindled revolutionary gospel faith may not build a movement effective enough to stop an authoritarian leader bent on turning back demographic inevitability by engineering a "whiter America," all while indulging his insatiable need for power.

But as Christians we must try.

FINALLY, THERE IS one more option to consider.

OPTION 4: The Mosquito. "If you think you are too small to make a difference," says the Dalai Lama, "try sleeping with a mosquito."

There is a reason Mr. Trump wants to "drain the swamp." Everywhere "mosquitoes" are taking small bites out of Mr. Trump's body politic—sanctuary churches, "deport me first" campaigns, active bystander trainings, circles of protection, citizen oversight committees to prevent police abuse, and so on. The mosquitoes are organizing a defense of the vulnerable and creative disruption of Mr. Trump's worldview. They are finding each other. Be forewarned—mosquitoes swarm. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



Are we American Christians or Christians in America?

ing wrath undetected. This escape behavior is instinctual in creatures that are startled or undeveloped.

Since the wee hours of Nov. 9, I've exhibited most of these behaviors myself.

But as a Christian, I'm not allowed to live in illusions for long. In Paul's "letter of tears," written to the fledgling church at Corinth, he wrote, "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Corinthians 13:8). Therefore, existing in a "post-truth" state is not an option.

Americans are deeply

Jesus and His Weird Friends

THE CHURCH'S CALENDAR always sits at odds with the world's. In the world, the season of light is Christmas. And that's long since gone by now. But in the church, the season of light is Epiphany, when God gives us a glimpse of all the strange people who will be drawn to Jesus. We gentiles rejoice. Jesus is bringing all his weird friends over for dinner. So maybe there's space at the table even for us.

Think of every dark place in our world. Every frightened child. Every violated person. Every victim of war or hunger. The darkness growls with endless hunger. Epiphany says this: God's light will shine and swallow up that darkness and make all things into unending day. Hopefully God will do that sooner rather than later—through our efforts, through the church, through our elected officials. But if not, God will bring the kingdom Jesus preached, one day. And there will be unending light for those who've faced the most darkness.

Epiphany is a good season in which to concentrate on the church—Jesus and all his weird friends. The lectionary showers us with stories from Matthew and the psalms and Corinthians about how odd and distinctive this community is. Ministers have the inestimable privilege of serving God's people. What joy! What light! What a marvel is the church of Jesus Christ.



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[FEBRUARY 5]

Now and Not Yet

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112:1-10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Matthew 5:13-20

CHRISTIANITY IS A religion of grace. We don't get what we deserve, thank God. We get so much more. And being people of grace, we try to show forth God's mercy in our life together—to show the world it is made and sustained in existence by a good, good God.

Sometimes when we tell our story that way, we sound like we don't care how we or anybody else acts. And yet scriptures like those for today show that God cares profoundly how we act. The prophet Isaiah screeches against religious observance not matched by passion for justice. The psalm promises unimaginable blessings for those who cherish God's law. Jesus insists he has no quarrel with the law. He has come, if anything, to observe it, enhance it, fulfill it—and if his people's observance doesn't exceed that of the Pharisees (that is, the professional law-abiding people), they're not his people at all.

So—are we a people of grace, or a people of works? The argument has thundered back and forth across the fault lines of

the Reformation between Protestants and Catholics for the half millennium we have known those names. Yet our text from Paul suggests both answers are wrong. We are people of Christ. No one should be more committed to justice than us. And yet we don't pursue justice to make ourselves look good. We do it for Christ's sake—and for the sake of others.

The psalm stands out in this text. The righteous in this world simply do not receive all the great things they're promised. There must be a new world coming where they do. Matthew describes a church that is not yet: salt to salt the world, light to illumine it. There must be a church coming that does. Paul describes a church and a world that very much *are* here now. We preach Jesus and the world thinks we're fools. But God has more good things in store for the church and the world than anyone can yet imagine. You'll see. Then we'll fast and pray and God will listen—and light will dawn on all.

[FEBRUARY 12]

Eyes and Hands

Sirach 15:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

"YOU HAVE HEARD it said ... but I say to you," says Jesus in Matthew 5. Barbara Brown Taylor says this text shows the limits of textual literalism. Even the most fundamentalist congregations are not full of eyeless skulls and handless limbs.

And yet scripture intends to be taken with deadly (if not self-mutilating) seriousness. There are two ways in life, the psalm says, and we can choose which way to go. If we want, we can behave, Sirach insists. It is not too hard to follow God's good way. It is, in fact, the best way to live.

This literalism thing is tricky. Some of Jesus' most dramatic turnarounds of existing tradition are here in Matthew: You have heard, but I say. It's where we get Christianity's most distinctive teaching: that we shouldn't hate our enemies, but love them. Throughout the history of the church, we have had sophisticated strategies to avoid reading these passages literally. But Jesus seems to mean it—else why the dramatic introductory locutions? And perhaps the more troubling portions of the passage have *another* literal sense. Matthew's church seems to have eventually and painfully removed those who were unrepentant sinners (see chapter 18). That's a sort of removal of a limb, loss of an eye. You don't resort to amputation hastily, but if it saves the whole body ...

Don't curse people—don't call them names. If you have a problem with a fellow Christian—leave your gift at the altar, go make amends—reconciliation trumps piety. Don't get divorced. Don't even swear. There is a rigorous moral life outlined for Christ's people here. Not a literalistic one. But a rich and deep one.

I worry that we so quickly denounce literal readings of Jesus' most dramatic words. Couldn't we take them in a literal sense as playful as Taylor's and as serious as, well, Jesus'? To have no truck with evil, not even a glance, not even an inner curse, not even the tiniest oath? Sounds like more than an impossible possibility. It sounds like the gospel.

[FEBRUARY 19]

Social Holiness

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18; Psalm 119:33-40;
1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23; Matthew 5:38-48

I SAID ABOVE that love of enemies is Christianity's most distinctive teaching. The very next lection has proved me wrong. There is nothing here that Jesus couldn't have learned while bouncing on Mary's knee. And nothing she couldn't have learned from Leviticus.

Our churches don't plan sermon series on Leviticus very often. The book contains few of the pet texts to which we preachers turn to by rote. And yet here it is, counseling love of enemies, the end of hatred, the absence of grudges. I remember hearing *The Late Late Show* host Craig Ferguson tell his guest Desmond Tutu that bitterness is like "drinking poison and expecting some-

This literalism thing is tricky.

one else to die." The Nobel laureate cooed in response: "That's good!" It didn't start with Jesus. It started with Leviticus.

Grace is as old as the oldest portions of our Bible. Leviticus goes farther, giving a plan for social holiness and justice that goes beyond our most ambitious ideas. When you plow, do it in a way that blesses the poor. When you make money, do it in a way that leaves some for the least. Don't put a stumbling block before the blind. And don't even favor the poor at court! God has a preferential option for the poor, sure, but even the rich deserve justice. What a moral feast here in Leviticus! Shame on us Christians for ever suggesting otherwise!

Paul's friends in Corinth have divided into factions. It's what we Christians do. (There's a joke about a guy on a desert island. His discoverers ask why he's built three dwellings. He replies: That's my home, that's my church, that's the church I used to go to.) Corinth was in shards over which teacher to follow. But Paul tells them every teacher is for them. And they're for Christ. And Christ is God's. All the teaching in scripture and tradition is for the church, so the church can be for Christ. And Christ is God's way of making the whole universe whole.

[FEBRUARY 26]

Great Visions?

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21;
Matthew 17:1-9

TRANSFIGURATION CROWNS this season of light. Jesus goes up the mountain the way Moses once did. But Jesus takes three followers with him on the way. Epiphanies are usually between one great leader and God. Here, that great leader, who is also God, takes three friends. They mess it all up—they always do, so do we, whoever "we" are. Jesus is not surprised. He restores them to fellowship, the way he does with all of us.

What do we do with visions like this?

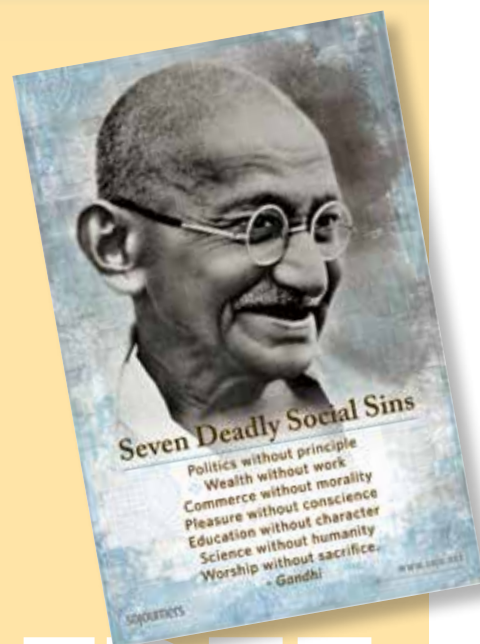
One approach is to delegitimize them. This was just a grab for power by someone in Matthew's community. Nah. Doesn't explain how a faith starts with unlearned fisher folk and now fills the globe.

Others naturalize them. Every mountain seethes with smoke and fire and is filled with the thundering presence of the Lord. Sure, in one way, all creation sings God's praise. In another, nah. The average leaf watcher or skier or sailor loves the outdoors, but doesn't come back with new, life-changing information directly from God's mouth.

My preference is to let the experience be weird. Peter, James, and John got a glimpse of a world that is not yet. Had we been there, we'd have blubbered something as inane as Peter did, and wasted the experience as fast as the sons of Zebedee did. But they told the story after he rose. The church wrote the story down. So now we give thanks that in one instance Christ peeled back the veil over creation and showed us the way things really are: shot through with glory, filled with unimaginable beauty, reverberating with God's personal presence. We won't likely have that in this life—and pastors know to worry about the mental health of any who claim otherwise. But this life isn't the only life there is. ■

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Your First 100 Days

Editor's note: At press time, the Electoral College had not yet validated the election results. If, by some miracle, Hillary Clinton is confirmed as president, the writer has refused to write a different column. "I'm not doing that again," he said.

SO HOW ARE you spending the first 100 days of the Trump administration? Canceling your newspaper subscription and turning off your television so you won't have to watch America becoming great again?

Would hiding under the covers make it go away? Or would it be better to crawl under the bed to keep out the scary? The latter would, of course, require vacuuming or moving the extra mattress you keep under there that only the cat uses. In either case, family members would



national unity, maybe fewer Nazi salutes would be a good start.)

IN THE FACE of such harsh reality, the best therapy I've found is to sit quietly in a darkened room and watch reruns of *Mr. Rogers*. It's always beautiful in his neighborhood, sweet songs are sung, and people change into comfortable shoes and sweaters when they come home.

Sadly, in the 1980s many of us young hipster parents dismissed Fred Rogers as insufferably dull, preferring Big Bird to Big Yawn. In hindsight, we now realize that his was a daily celebration of the human spirit that showed our children the enduring importance of love. (Yep, we got that one *totally* wrong.) If ever there was a time to be reminded of our common humanity—even with those dreadful hand puppets—it is now.

Because after Trump's first 100 days, it could get worse. Americans who voted for him will start to wonder why the coal mines are still closed and factories yet to reopen. (I hear a new Cheesecake Factory is coming to the mall, but it's only hiring part-time.)

The bitter truth will begin to set in, like that feeling you get when you eat Skittles. The first bite is a euphoric moment of tangy sweetness, unrivaled by any other candy. And with it comes a sense of welcome emancipation from the M&Ms establishment, that entitled class of mainstream confections. You've chosen the road less traveled, even if it's a little sticky.

But when you swallow a Skittle, the euphoria ends with an acrid, vaguely industrial aftertaste that suggests a petrochemical product long past its freshness date. With its subtle undertones of methanol and a hint of machine solvents—to borrow the vernacular of wine connoisseurs—it doesn't "finish well."

In other words, Trump voters were happy that he won, but when they step back—and swallow reality—the country will still be a jobless wasteland of anger and resentment for many of its citizens. It will leave a bitter taste in the mouth, one that will not be relieved even at the trendy white ethnic restaurants cropping up around the country. Their familiar and nostalgic cuisine—mostly ketchup-based—will be a symbolic victory for tribalism. But people will grow weary of mashed potatoes and will soon wish they had, you know, a decent taco.

PERSONALLY, I'M taking comfort in my recent discovery that Bernie Sanders lives right next door to our new office. When I occasionally crawl out from under my bed—to the frustration of the cat who had just gotten comfortable—I stand at an office window and keep watch for him. Wait, SOMEONE'S COMING OUT THE BACK DOOR! Nope, it's a different neighbor, taking his old Clinton yard sign to the trash.

(Too soon?) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Time to take up knitting? Hiking? Rage-blogging?

grow weary of bringing food, so these options might require further thought.

THE FEAR IS going to be with us for a while. We've elected a president who has been accused of misogyny, xenophobia, and demagoguery, all words I had to look up to see if they were as bad as they sound. (Worse.) Not to mention having to spell check that last one, which to my surprise does not refer to a character in the last *Iron Man* movie.

And the principal adviser to our new president is an unapologetic white supremacist whose safari jacket doesn't conceal his striking resemblance to Rasputin. (Now that I mention it, did they ever find Rasputin's body?) And the voters most ecstatic about his presence in the White House are having difficulty keeping their arms down at their sides. (In an effort to build

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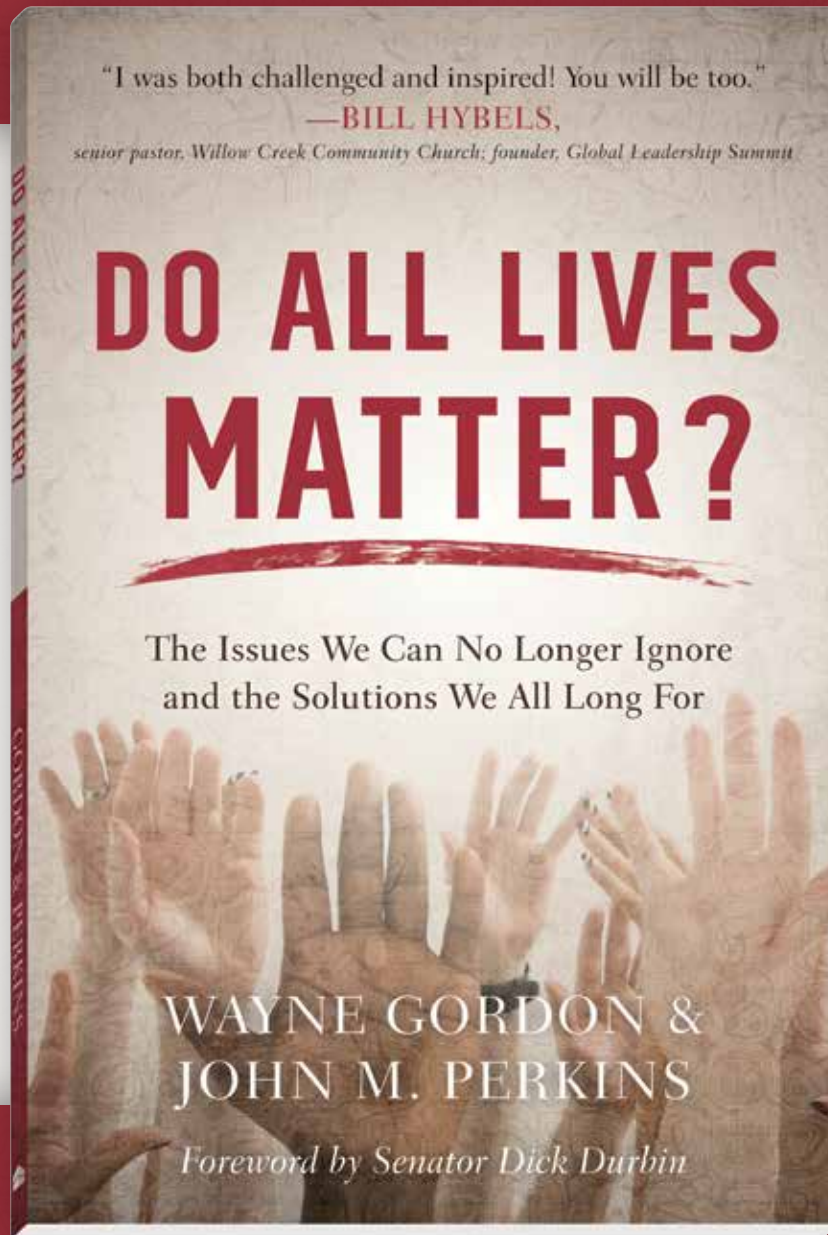
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The belief that all lives matter is at the heart of our founding documents—but we must admit that this conviction has never truly reflected reality in America. Movements such as Black Lives Matter have arisen in response to recent displays of violence and mistreatment, and some of us defensively answer back, “All lives matter.” But do they? Really?

This book is an exploration of that question. It delves into history and current events, into Christian teaching and personal stories, in order to start a conversation about the way forward. We cannot do everything. But we can each do *something*.



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